THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT

CAPTAIN CRAIG

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E. A. Robinson

COLLECTED POEMS

THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT
CAPTAIN CRAIG

By EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

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NEW YORK MCMXXVII

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THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT

(1890–1897)

To the Memory of
My Father and Mother

JOHN EVERELDOWN

"Where are you going to-night, to-night,—
Where are you going, John Evereldown?
There's never the sign of a star in sight,
Nor a lamp that's nearer than Tilbury Town.
Why do you stare as a dead man might?
Where are you pointing away from the light?
And where are you going to-night, to-night,—
Where are you going, John Evereldown?"

"Right through the forest, where none can see,
There's where I'm going, to Tilbury Town.
The men are asleep,—or awake, may be,—
But the women are calling John Evereldown.
Ever and ever they call for me,
And while they call can a man be free?
So right through the forest, where none can see,
There's where I'm going, to Tilbury Town."

"But why are you going so late, so late,—
  Why are you going, John Evereldown?
Though the road be smooth and the way be straight,
  There are two long leagues to Tilbury Town.
Come in by the fire, old man, and wait!
Why do you chatter out there by the gate?
And why are you going so late, so late,—
  Why are you going, John Evereldown?"

"I follow the women wherever they call,—
  That's why I'm going to Tilbury Town.
God knows if I pray to be done with it all,
  But God is no friend to John Evereldown.
So the clouds may come and the rain may fall,
The shadows may creep and the dead may crawl,—
But I follow the women wherever they call,
  And that's why I'm going to Tilbury Town."

LUKE HAVERGAL

Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There where the vines cling crimson on the wall,
And in the twilight wait for what will come.
The leaves will whisper there of her, and some,
Like flying words, will strike you as they fall;
But go, and if you listen she will call.
Go to the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies
To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;
But there, where western glooms are gathering,
The dark will end the dark, if anything:
God slays Himself with every leaf that flies,
And hell is more than half of paradise.
No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies—
In eastern skies.

Out of a grave I come to tell you this,
Out of a grave I come to quench the kiss
That flames upon your forehead with a glow
That blinds you to the way that you must go.

Yes, there is yet one way to where she is,
Bitter, but one that faith may never miss.
Out of a grave I come to tell you this—
To tell you this.

There is the western gate, Luke Havergal,
There are the crimson leaves upon the wall.
Go, for the winds are tearing them away,—
Nor think to riddle the dead words they say,
Nor any more to feel them as they fall;
But go, and if you trust her she will call.
There is the western gate, Luke Havergal—
Luke Havergal.

THREE QUATRAINS

I

As long as Fame's imperious music rings
  Will poets mock it with crowned words august;
And haggard men will clamber to be kings
  As long as Glory weighs itself in dust.

II

Drink to the splendor of the unfulfilled,
  Nor shudder for the revels that are done:
The wines that flushed Lucullus are all spilled,
  The strings that Nero fingered are all gone.

III

We cannot crown ourselves with everything,
  Nor can we coax the Fates for us to quarrel:
No matter what we are, or what we sing,
  Time finds a withered leaf in every laurel.

AN OLD STORY

Strange that I did not know him then,
That friend of mine!
I did not even show him then
One friendly sign;

But cursed him for the ways he had
To make me see
My envy of the praise he had
For praising me.

I would have rid the earth of him
Once, in my pride. . . .
I never knew the worth of him
Until he died.

BALLADE BY THE FIRE

Slowly I smoke and hug my knee,
The while a witless masquerade
Of things that only children see
Floats in a mist of light and shade:
They pass, a flimsy cavalcade,
And with a weak, remindful glow,
The falling embers break and fade,
As one by one the phantoms go.

Then, with a melancholy glee
To think where once my fancy strayed,
I muse on what the years may be
Whose coming tales are all unsaid,
Till tongs and shovel, snugly laid
Within their shadowed niches, grow
By grim degrees to pick and spade,
As one by one the phantoms go.

But then, what though the mystic Three
Around me ply their merry trade?—
And Charon soon may carry me
Across the gloomy Stygian glade?—

Be up, my soul; nor be afraid
Of what some unborn year may show;
But mind your human debts are paid,
As one by one the phantoms go.

ENVOY

Life is the game that must be played:
This truth at least, good friends, we know;
So live and laugh, nor be dismayed
As one by one the phantoms go.

BALLADE OF BROKEN FLUTES

(*To A. T. Schumann*)

In dreams I crossed a barren land,
A land of ruin, far away;
Around me hung on every hand
A deathful stillness of decay;
And silent, as in bleak dismay
That song should thus forsaken be,
On that fogotten ground there lay
The broken flutes of Arcady.

The forest that was all so grand
When pipes and tabors had their sway
Stood leafless now, a ghostly band
Of skeletons in cold array.
A lonely surge of ancient spray
Told of an unforgetful sea,
But iron blows had hushed for aye
The broken flutes of Arcady.

No more by summer breezes fanned,
The place was desolate and gray;
But still my dream was to command

New life into that shrunken clay.
I tried it. And you scan to-day,
With uncommiserating glee,
The songs of one who strove to play
The broken flutes of Arcady.

ENVOY

So, Rock, I join the common fray,
To fight where Mammon may decree;
And leave, to crumble as they may,
The broken flutes of Arcady.

HER EYES

Up from the street and the crowds that went,
Morning and midnight, to and fro,
Still was the room where his days he spent,
And the stars were bleak, and the nights were slow.

Year after year, with his dream shut fast,
He suffered and strove till his eyes were dim,
For the love that his brushes had earned at last,
And the whole world rang with the praise of him.

But he cloaked his triumph, and searched, instead,
Till his cheeks were sere and his hairs were gray.
"There are women enough, God knows," he said.
"There are stars enough—when the sun's away."

Then he went back to the same still room
That had held his dream in the long ago,
When he buried his days in a nameless tomb,
And the stars were bleak, and the nights were slow.

And a passionate humor seized him there—
Seized him and held him until there grew

Like life on his canvas, glowing and fair,
A perilous face—and an angel's too.

Angel and maiden, and all in one,—
All but the eyes. They were there, but yet
They seemed somehow like a soul half done.
What was the matter? Did God forget? . . .

But he wrought them at last with a skill so sure
That her eyes were the eyes of a deathless woman,—
With a gleam of heaven to make them pure,
And a glimmer of hell to make them human.

God never forgets.—And he worships her
There in that same still room of his,
For his wife, and his constant arbiter
Of the world that was and the world that is.

And he wonders yet what her love could be
To punish him after that strife so grim;
But the longer he lives with her eyes to see,
The plainer it all comes back to him.

TWO MEN

There be two men of all mankind
  That I should like to know about;
But search and question where I will,
  I cannot ever find them out.

Melchizedek, he praised the Lord,
  And gave some wine to Abraham;
But who can tell what else he did
  Must be more learned than I am.

Ucalegon, he lost his house
  When Agamemnon came to Troy;
But who can tell me who he was—
  I'll pray the gods to give him joy.

There be two men of all mankind
  That I'm forever thinking on:
They chase me everywhere I go,—
  Melchizedek, Ucalegon.

VILLANELLE OF CHANGE

Since Persia fell at Marathon,
The yellow years have gathered fast:
Long centuries have come and gone.

And yet (they say) the place will don
A phantom fury of the past,
Since Persia fell at Marathon;

And as of old, when Helicon
Trembled and swayed with rapture vast
(Long centuries have come and gone),

This ancient plain, when night comes on,
Shakes to a ghostly battle-blast,
Since Persia fell at Marathon.

But into soundless Acheron
The glory of Greek shame was cast:
Long centuries have come and gone,

The suns of Hellas have all shone,
The first has fallen to the last:—
Since Persia fell at Marathon,
Long centuries have come and gone.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

They are all gone away,
The House is shut and still,
There is nothing more to say.

Through broken walls and gray
The winds blow bleak and shrill:
They are all gone away.

Nor is there one to-day
To speak them good or ill:
There is nothing more to say.

Why is it then we stray
Around the sunken sill?
They are all gone away,

And our poor fancy-play
For them is wasted skill:
There is nothing more to say.

There is ruin and decay
In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say.

RICHARD CORY

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

BOSTON

My northern pines are good enough for me,
But there's a town my memory uprears—
A town that always like a friend appears,
And always in the sunrise by the sea.
And over it, somehow, there seems to be
A downward flash of something new and fierce,
That ever strives to clear, but never clears
The dimness of a charmed antiquity.

CALVARY

Friendless and faint, with martyred steps and slow,
Faint for the flesh, but for the spirit free,
Stung by the mob that came to see the show,
The Master toiled along to Calvary;
We gibed him, as he went, with houndish glee,
Till his dimned eyes for us did overflow;
We cursed his vengeless hands thrice wretchedly,—
And this was nineteen hundred years ago.

But after nineteen hundred years the shame
Still clings, and we have not made good the loss
That outraged faith has entered in his name.
Ah, when shall come love's courage to be strong!
Tell me, O Lord—tell me, O Lord, how long
Are we to keep Christ writhing on the cross!

DEAR FRIENDS

Dear friends, reproach me not for what I do,
Nor counsel me, nor pity me; nor say
That I am wearing half my life away
For bubble-work that only fools pursue.
And if my bubbles be too small for you,
Blow bigger then your own: the games we play
To fill the frittered minutes of a day,
Good glasses are to read the spirit through.

And whoso reads may get him some shrewd skill;
And some unprofitable scorn resign,
To praise the very thing that he deplores.
So, friends (dear friends), remember, if you will,
The shame I win for singing is all mine,
The gold I miss for dreaming is all yours.

THE STORY OF THE ASHES AND THE FLAME

No matter why, nor whence, nor when she came,
There was her place. No matter what men said,
No matter what she was; living or dead,
Faithful or not, he loved her all the same.
The story was as old as human shame,
But ever since that lonely night she fled,
With books to blind him, he had only read
The story of the ashes and the flame.

There she was always coming pretty soon
To fool him back, with penitent scared eyes
That had in them the laughter of the moon
For baffled lovers, and to make him think—
Before she gave him time enough to wink—
Her kisses were the keys to Paradise.

AMARYLLIS

Once, when I wandered in the woods alone,
An old man tottered up to me and said,
"Come, friend, and see the grave that I have made
For Amaryllis." There was in the tone
Of his complaint such quaver and such moan
That I took pity on him and obeyed,
And long stood looking where his hands had laid
An ancient woman, shrunk to skin and bone.

Far out beyond the forest I could hear
The calling of loud progress, and the bold
Incessant scream of commerce ringing clear;
But though the trumpets of the world were glad,
It made me lonely and it made me sad
To think that Amaryllis had grown old.

Because he puts the compromising chart
Of hell before your eyes, you are afraid;
Because he counts the price that you have paid
For innocence, and counts it from the start,
You loathe him. But he sees the human heart
Of God meanwhile, and in His hand was weighed
Your squeamish and emasculate crusade
Against the grim dominion of his art.

Never until we conquer the uncouth
Connivings of our shamed indifference
(We call it Christian faith) are we to scan
The racked and shrieking hideousness of Truth
To find, in hate's polluted self-defence
Throbbing, the pulse, the divine heart of man.

THE PITY OF THE LEAVES

Vengeful across the cold November moors,
Loud with ancestral shame there came the bleak
Sad wind that shrieked, and answered with a shriek,
Reverberant through lonely corridors.
The old man heard it; and he heard, perforce,
Words out of lips that were no more to speak—
Words of the past that shook the old man's cheek
Like dead, remembered footsteps on old floors.

And then there were the leaves that plagued him so!
The brown, thin leaves that on the stones outside
Skipped with a freezing whisper. Now and then
They stopped, and stayed there—just to let him know
How dead they were; but if the old man cried,
They fluttered off like withered souls of men.

AARON STARK

Withal a meagre man was Aaron Stark,
Cursed and unkempt, shrewd, shrivelled, and morose.
A miser was he, with a miser's nose,
And eyes like little dollars in the dark.
His thin, pinched mouth was nothing but a mark;
And when he spoke there came like sullen blows
Through scattered fangs a few snarled words and close,
As if a cur were chary of its bark.

Glad for the murmur of his hard renown,
Year after year he shambled through the town,
A loveless exile moving with a staff;
And oftentimes there crept into his ears
A sound of alien pity, touched with tears,—
And then (and only then) did Aaron laugh.

THE GARDEN

There is a fenceless garden overgrown
With buds and blossoms and all sorts of leaves;
And once, among the roses and the sheaves,
The Gardener and I were there alone.
He led me to the plot where I had thrown
The fennel of my days on wasted ground,
And in that riot of sad weeds I found
The fruitage of a life that was my own.

My life! Ah, yes, there was my life, indeed!
And there were all the lives of humankind;
And they were like a book that I could read,
Whose every leaf, miraculously signed,
Outrolled itself from Thought's eternal seed.
Love-rooted in God's garden of the mind.

CLIFF KLINGENHAGEN

Cliff Klingenhagen had me in to dine
With him one day; and after soup and meat,
And all the other things there were to eat,
Cliff took two glasses and filled one with wine
And one with wormwood. Then, without a sign
For me to choose at all, he took the draught
Of bitterness himself, and lightly quaffed
It off, and said the other one was mine.

And when I asked him what the deuce he meant
By doing that, he only looked at me
And smiled, and said it was a way of his.
And though I know the fellow, I have spent
Long time a-wondering when I shall be
As happy as Cliff Klingenhagen is.

CHARLES CARVILLE'S EYES

A melancholy face Charles Carville had,
But not so melancholy as it seemed,
When once you knew him, for his mouth redeemed
His insufficient eyes, forever sad:
In them there was no life-glimpse, good or bad,
Nor joy nor passion in them ever gleamed;
His mouth was all of him that ever beamed,
His eyes were sorry, but his mouth was glad.

He never was a fellow that said much,
And half of what he did say was not heard
By many of us: we were out of touch
With all his whims and all his theories
Till he was dead, so those blank eyes of his
Might speak them. Then we heard them, every word.

THE DEAD VILLAGE

Here there is death. But even here, they say,
Here where the dull sun shines this afternoon
As desolate as ever the dead moon
Did glimmer on dead Sardis, men were gay;
And there were little children here to play,
With small soft hands that once did keep in tune
The strings that stretch from heaven, till too soon
The change came, and the music passed away.

Now there is nothing but the ghosts of things,—
No life, no love, no children, and no men;
And over the forgotten place there clings
The strange and unrememberable light
That is in dreams. The music failed, and then
God frowned, and shut the village from His sight.

TWO SONNETS

I

Just as I wonder at the twofold screen
Of twisted innocence that you would plait
For eyes that uncourageously await
The coming of a kingdom that has been,
So do I wonder what God's love can mean
To you that all so strangely estimate
The purpose and the consequent estate
Of one short shuddering step to the Unseen.

No, I have not your backward faith to shrink
Lone-faring from the doorway of God's home
To find Him in the names of buried men;
Nor your ingenious recreance to think
We cherish, in the life that is to come,
The scattered features of dead friends again.

TWO SONNETS

II

Never until our souls are strong enough
To plunge into the crater of the Scheme—
Triumphant in the flash there to redeem
Love's hansel and forevermore to slough,
Like cerements at a played-out masque, the rough
And reptile skins of us whereon we set
The stigma of scared years—are we to get
Where atoms and the ages are one stuff.

Nor ever shall we know the cursed waste
Of life in the beneficence divine
Of starlight and of sunlight and soul-shine
That we have squandered in sin's frail distress,
Till we have drunk, and trembled at the taste,
The mead of Thought's prophetic endlessness.

I did not think that I should find them there
When I came back again; but there they stood,
As in the days they dreamed of when young blood
Was in their cheeks and women called them fair.
Be sure, they met me with an ancient air,—
And yes, there was a shop-worn brotherhood
About them; but the men were just as good,
And just as human as they ever were.

And you that ache so much to be sublime,
And you that feed yourselves with your descent,
What comes of all your visions and your fears?
Poets and kings are but the clerks of Time,
Tiering the same dull webs of discontent,
Clipping the same sad alnage of the years.

At first I thought there was a superfine
Persuasion in his face; but the free glow
That filled it when he stopped and cried, "Hollo!"
Shone joyously, and so I let it shine.
He said his name was Fleming Helphenstine,
But be that as it may;—I only know
He talked of this and that and So-and-So,
And laughed and chaffed like any friend of mine.

But soon, with a queer, quick frown, he looked at me,
And I looked hard at him; and there we gazed
In a strained way that made us cringe and wince:
Then, with a wordless clogged apology
That sounded half confused and half amazed,
He dodged,—and I have never seen him since.

The man who cloaked his bitterness within
This winding-sheet of puns and pleasantries,
God never gave to look with common eyes
Upon a world of anguish and of sin:
His brother was the branded man of Lynn;
And there are woven with his jollities
The nameless and eternal tragedies
That render hope and hopelessness akin.

We laugh, and crown him; but anon we feel
A still chord sorrow-swept,—a weird unrest;
And thin dim shadows home to midnight steal,
As if the very ghost of mirth were dead—
As if the joys of time to dreams had fled,
Or sailed away with Ines to the West.

HORACE TO LEUCONOË

I pray you not, Leuconoë, to pore
With unpermitted eyes on what may be
Appointed by the gods for you and me,
Nor on Chaldean figures any more.
'T were infinitely better to implore
The present only:—whether Jove decree
More winters yet to come, or whether he
Make even this, whose hard, wave-eaten shore
Shatters the Tuscan seas to-day, the last—
Be wise withal, and rack your wine, nor fill
Your bosom with large hopes; for while I sing,
The envious close of time is narrowing;
So seize the day, or ever it be past,
And let the morrow come for what it will.

REUBEN BRIGHT

Because he was a butcher and thereby
Did earn an honest living (and did right),
I would not have you think that Reuben Bright
Was any more a brute than you or I;
For when they told him that his wife must die,
He stared at them, and shook with grief and fright,
And cried like a great baby half that night,
And made the women cry to see him cry.

And after she was dead, and he had paid
The singers and the sexton and the rest,
He packed a lot of things that she had made
Most mournfully away in an old chest
Of hers, and put some chopped-up cedar boughs
In with them, and tore down the slaughter-house.

THE ALTAR

Alone, remote, nor witting where I went,
I found an altar builded in a dream—
A fiery place, whereof there was a gleam
So swift, so searching, and so eloquent
Of upward promise, that love's murmur, blent
With sorrow's warning, gave but a supreme
Unending impulse to that human stream
Whose flood was all for the flame's fury bent.

Alas! I said,—the world is in the wrong.
But the same quenchless fever of unrest
That thrilled the foremost of that martyred throng
Thrilled me, and I awoke . . . and was the same
Bewildered insect plunging for the flame
That burns, and must burn somehow for the best.

THE TAVERN

Whenever I go by there nowadays
And look at the rank weeds and the strange grass,
The torn blue curtains and the broken glass,
I seem to be afraid of the old place;
And something stiffens up and down my face,
For all the world as if I saw the ghost
Of old Ham Amory, the murdered host,
With his dead eyes turned on me all aglaze.

The Tavern has a story, but no man
Can tell us what it is. We only know
That once long after midnight, years ago,
A stranger galloped up from Tilbury Town,
Who brushed, and scared, and all but overran
That skirt-crazed reprobate, John Evereldown.

SONNET

Oh for a poet—for a beacon bright
To rift this changeless glimmer of dead gray;
To spirit back the Muses, long astray,
And flush Parnassus with a newer light;
To put these little sonnet-men to flight
Who fashion, in a shrewd mechanic way,
Songs without souls, that flicker for a day,
To vanish in irrevocable night.

What does it mean, this barren age of ours?
Here are the men, the women, and the flowers,
The seasons, and the sunset, as before.
What does it mean? Shall there not one arise
To wrench one banner from the western skies,
And mark it with his name forevermore?

GEORGE CRABBE

Give him the darkest inch your shelf allows,
Hide him in lonely garrets, if you will,
But his hard, human pulse is throbbing still
With the sure strength that fearless truth endows.
In spite of all fine science disavows,
Of his plain excellence and stubborn skill
There yet remains what fashion cannot kill,
Though years have thinned the laurel from his brows.

Whether or not we read him, we can feel
From time to time the vigor of his name
Against us like a finger for the shame
And emptiness of what our souls reveal
In books that are as altars where we kneel
To consecrate the flicker, not the flame.

CREDO

I cannot find my way: there is no star
In all the shrouded heavens anywhere;
And there is not a whisper in the air
Of any living voice but one so far
That I can hear it only as a bar
Of lost, imperial music, played when fair
And angel fingers wove, and unaware,
Dead leaves to garlands where no roses are.

No, there is not a glimmer, nor a call,
For one that welcomes, welcomes when he fears,
The black and awful chaos of the night;
For through it all—above, beyond it all—
I know the far-sent message of the years,
I feel the coming glory of the Light.

ON THE NIGHT OF A FRIEND'S WEDDING

If ever I am old and all alone,
I shall have killed one grief, at any rate;
For then, thank God, I shall not have to wait
Much longer for the sheaves that I have sown.
The devil only knows what I have done,
But here I am, and here are six or eight
Good friends, who most ingenuously prate
About my songs to such and such a one.

But everything is all askew to-night,—
As if the time were come, or almost come,
For their untenanted mirage of me
To lose itself and crumble out of sight,
Like a tall ship that floats above the foam
A little while, and then breaks utterly.

SONNET

The master and the slave go hand in hand,
Though touch be lost. The poet is a slave,
And there be kings do sorrowfully crave
The joyance that a scullion may command.
But, ah, the sonnet-slave must understand
The mission of his bondage, or the grave
May clasp his bones, or ever he shall save
The perfect word that is the poet's wand.

The sonnet is a crown, whereof the rhymes
Are for Thought's purest gold the jewel-stones;
But shapes and echoes that are never done
Will haunt the workship, as regret sometimes
Will bring with human yearning to sad thrones
The crash of battles that are never won.

Why do you dig like long-clawed scavengers
To touch the covered corpse of him that fled
The uplands for the fens, and rioted
Like a sick satyr with doom's worshippers?
Come! let the grass grow there; and leave his verse
To tell the story of the life he led.
Let the man go: let the dead flesh be dead,
And let the worms be its biographers.

Song sloughs away the sin to find redress
In art's complete remembrance: nothing clings
For long but laurel to the stricken brow
That felt the Muse's finger: nothing less
Than hell's fulfillment of the end of things
Can blot the star that shines on Paris now.

SONNET

When we can all so excellently give
The measure of love's wisdom with a blow,
Why can we not in turn receive it so,
And end this murmur for the life we live?
And when we do so frantically strive
To win strange faith, why do we shun to know
That in love's elemental over-glow
God's wholeness gleams with light superlative?

Oh, brother men, if you have eyes at all,
Look at a branch, a bird, a child, a rose,
Or anything God ever made that grows,—
Nor let the smallest vision of it slip,
Till you may read, as on Belshazzar's wall,
The glory of eternal partnership.

SUPREMACY

There is a drear and lonely tract of hell
From all the common gloom removed afar:
A flat, sad land it is, where shadows are,
Whose lorn estate my verse may never tell.
I walked among them and I knew them well:
Men I had slandered on life's little star
For churls and sluggards; and I knew the scar
Upon their brows of woe ineffable.

But as I went majestic on my way,
Into the dark they vanished, one by one,
Till, with a shaft of God's eternal day,
The dream of all my glory was undone,—
And, with a fool's importunate dismay,
I heard the dead men singing in the sun.

THE CHORUS OF OLD MEN IN "ÆGEUS"

Ye gods that have a home beyond the world,
Ye that have eyes for all man's agony,
Ye that have seen this woe that we have seen,—
Look with a just regard,
And with an even grace,
Here on the shattered corpse of a shattered king,
Here on a suffering world where men grow old
And wander like sad shadows till, at last,
Out of the flare of life,
Out of the whirl of years,
Into the mist they go,
Into the mist of death.

O shades of you that loved him long before
The cruel threads of that black sail were spun,
May loyal arms and ancient welcomings
Receive him once again
Who now no longer moves
Here in this flickering dance of changing days,
Where a battle is lost and won for a withered wreath,
And the black master Death is over all

To chill with his approach,
To level with his touch,
The reigning strength of youth,
The fluttered heart of age.

Woe for the fateful day when Delphi's word was lost—
Woe for the loveless prince of Æthra's line!
Woe for a father's tears and the curse of a king's release—
Woe for the wings of pride and the shafts of doom!
And thou, the saddest wind
That ever blew from Crete,
Sing the fell tidings back to that thrice unhappy ship!—
Sing to the western flame,
Sing to the dying foam.
A dirge for the sundered years and a dirge for the years to be!

Better his end had been as the end of a cloudless day,
Bright, by the word of Zeus, with a golden star,
Wrought of a golden fame, and flung to the central sky,
To gleam on a stormless tomb for evermore:—
Whether or not there fell
To the touch of an alien hand

The sheen of his purple robe and the shine of his diadem,
Better his end had been
To die as an old man dies,—
But the fates are ever the fates, and a crown is ever a crown.

THE WILDERNESS

Come away! come away! there's a frost along the marshes,
And a frozen wind that skims the shoal where it shakes the dead black water;
There's a moan across the lowland and a wailing through the woodland
Of a dirge that sings to send us back to the arms of those that love us.
There is nothing left but ashes now where the crimson chills of autumn
Put off the summer's languor with a touch that made us glad
For the glory that is gone from us, with a flight we cannot follow,
To the slopes of other valleys and the sounds of other shores.

Come away! come away! you can hear them calling, calling,
Calling us to come to them, and roam no more.
Over there beyond the ridges and the land that lies between us,
There's an old song calling us to come!

Come away! come away!—for the scenes we leave behind us
Are barren for the lights of home and a flame that's young forever;

And the lonely trees around us creak the warning of the night-wind,
That love and all the dreams of love are away beyond the mountains.
The songs that call for us to-night, they have called for men before us,
And the winds that blow the message, they have blown ten thousand years;
But this will end our wander-time, for we know the joy that waits us
In the strangeness of home-coming, and a woman's waiting eyes.

Come away! come away! there is nothing now to cheer us—
Nothing now to comfort us, but love's road home:—
Over there beyond the darkness there's a window gleams to greet us,
And a warm hearth waits for us within.

Come away! come away!—or the roving-fiend will hold us,
And make us all to dwell with him to the end of human faring:
There are no men yet may leave him when his hands are clutched upon them,

There are none will own his enmity, there are none will call him
brother.
So we'll be up and on the way, and the less we boast the better
For the freedom that God gave us and the dread we do not
know:
The frost that skips the willow-leaf will again be back to blight
it,
And the doom we cannot fly from is the doom we do not see.

Come away! come away! there are dead men all around us—
Frozen men that mock us with a wild, hard laugh
That shrieks and sinks and whimpers in the shrill November
rushes,
And the long fall wind on the lake.

OCTAVES

I

We thrill too strangely at the master's touch;
We shrink too sadly from the larger self
Which for its own completeness agitates
And undetermines us; we do not feel—
We dare not feel it yet—the splendid shame
Of uncreated failure; we forget,
The while we groan, that God's accomplishment
Is always and unfailingly at hand.

II

Tumultously void of a clean scheme
Whereon to build, whereof to formulate,
The legion life that riots in mankind
Goes ever plunging upward, up and down,
Most like some crazy regiment at arms,
Undisciplined of aught but Ignorance,
And ever led resourcelessly along
To brainless carnage by drunk trumpeters.

III

To me the groaning of world-worshippers
Rings like a lonely music played in hell

By one with art enough to cleave the walls
Of heaven with his cadence, but without
The wisdom or the will to comprehend
The strangeness of his own perversity,
And all without the courage to deny
The profit and the pride of his defeat.

IV

While we are drilled in error, we are lost
Alike to truth and usefulness. We think
We are great warriors now, and we can brag
Like Titans; but the world is growing young,
And we, the fools of time, are growing with it:—
We do not fight to-day, we only die;
We are too proud of death, and too ashamed
Of God, to know enough to be alive.

V

There is one battle-field whereon we fall
Triumphant and unconquered; but, alas!
We are too fleshly fearful of ourselves
To fight there till our days are whirled and blurred
By sorrow, and the ministering wheels

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Of anguish take us eastward, where the clouds
Of human gloom are lost against the gleam
That shines on Thought's impenetrable mail.

VI

When we shall hear no more the cradle-songs
Of ages—when the timeless hymns of Love
Defeat them and outsound them—we shall know
The rapture of that large release which all
Right science comprehends; and we shall read,
With unoppressed and unoffended eyes,
That record of All-Soul whereon God writes
In everlasting runes the truth of Him.

VII

The guerdon of new childhood is repose:—
Once he has read the primer of right thought,
A man may claim between two smithy strokes
Beatitude enough to realize
God's parallel completeness in the vague
And incommensurable excellence
That equitably uncreates itself
And makes a whirlwind of the Universe.

VIII

There is no loneliness:—no matter where
We go, nor whence we come, nor what good friends
Forsake us in the seeming, we are all
At one with a complete companionship;
And though forlornly joyless be the ways
We travel, the compensate spirit-gleams
Of Wisdom shaft the darkness here and there,
Like scattered lamps in unfrequented streets.

IX

When one that you and I had all but sworn
To be the purest thing God ever made
Bewilders us until at last it seems
An angel has come back restigmatized,—
Faith wavers, and we wonder what there is
On earth to make us faithful any more,
But never are quite wise enough to know
The wisdom that is in that wonderment.

X

Where does a dead man go?—The dead man dies;
But the free life that would no longer feed

On fagots of outburned and shattered flesh
Wakes to a thrilled invisible advance,
Unchained (or fettered else) of memory;
And when the dead man goes it seems to me
'T were better for us all to do away
With weeping, and be glad that he is gone.

XI

Still through the dusk of dead, blank-legended,
And unremunerative years we search
To get where life begins, and still we groan
Because we do not find the living spark
Where no spark ever was; and thus we die,
Still searching, like poor old astronomers
Who totter off to bed and go to sleep,
To dream of untriangulated stars.

XII

With conscious eyes not yet sincere enough
To pierce the glimmered cloud that fluctuates
Between me and the glorifying light
That screens itself with knowledge, I discern
The searching rays of wisdom that reach through

The mist of shame's infirm credulity,
And infinitely wonder if hard words
Like mine have any message for the dead.

XIII

I grant you friendship is a royal thing,
But none shall ever know that royalty
For what it is till he has realized
His best friend in himself. 'T is then, perforce,
That man's unfettered faith indemnifies
Of its own conscious freedom the old shame,
And love's revealed infinitude supplants
Of its own wealth and wisdom the old scorn.

XIV

Though the sick beast infect us, we are fraught
Forever with indissoluble Truth,
Wherein redress reveals itself divine,
Transitional, transcendent. Grief and loss,
Disease and desolation, are the dreams
Of wasted excellence; and every dream
Has in it something of an ageless fact
That flouts deformity and laughs at years.

XV

We lack the courage to be where we are:—
We love too much to travel on old roads,
To triumph on old fields; we love too much
To consecrate the magic of dead things,
And yieldingly to linger by long walls
Of ruin, where the ruinous moonlight
That sheds a lying glory on old stones
Befriends us with a wizard's enmity.

XVI

Something as one with eyes that look below
The battle-smoke to glimpse the foeman's charge,
We through the dust of downward years may scan
The onslaught that awaits this idiot world
Where blood pays blood for nothing, and where life
Pays life to madness, till at last the ports
Of gilded helplessness be battered through
By the still crash of salvatory steel.

XVII

To you that sit with Sorrow like chained slaves
And wonder if the night will ever come,

I would say this: The night will never come,
And sorrow is not always. But my words
Are not enough; your eyes are not enough;
The soul itself must insulate the Real,
Or ever you do cherish in this life—
In this life or in any life—repose.

XVIII

Like a white wall whereon forever breaks
Unsatisfied the tumult of green seas,
Man's unconjectured godliness rebukes
With its imperial silence the lost waves
Of insufficient grief. This mortal surge
That beats against us now is nothing else
Than plangent ignorance. Truth neither shakes
Nor wavers; but the world shakes, and we shriek.

XIX

Nor jewelled phrase nor mere mellifluous rhyme
Reverberates aright, or ever shall,
One cadence of that infinite plain-song
Which is itself all music. Stronger notes
Than any that have ever touched the world

Must ring to tell it—ring like hammer-blows,
Right-echoed of a chime primordial,
On anvils, in the gleaming of God's forge.

XX

The prophet of dead words defeats himself:
Whoever would acknowledge and include
The foregleam and the glory of the real,
Must work with something else than pen and ink
And painful preparation: he must work
With unseen implements that have nō names,
And he must win withal, to do that work,
Good fortitude, clean wisdom, and strong skill.

XXI

To curse the chilled insistence of the dawn
Because the free gleam lingers; to defraud
The constant opportunity that lives
Unchallenged in all sorrow; to forget
For this large prodigality of gold
That larger generosity of thought,—
These are the fleshly clogs of human greed,
The fundamental blunders of mankind.

XXII

Forebodings are the fiends of Recreance;
The master of the moment, the clean seer
Of ages, too securely scans what is,
Ever to be appalled at what is not;
He sees beyond the groaning borough lines
Of Hell, God's highways gleaming, and he knows
That Love's complete communion is the end
Of anguish to the liberated man.

XXIII

Here by the windy docks I stand alone,
But yet companioned. There the vessel goes,
And there my friend goes with it; but the wake
That melts and ebbs between that friend and me
Love's earnest is of Life's all-purposeful
And all-triumphant sailing, when the ships
Of Wisdom loose their fretful chains and swing
Forever from the crumbled wharves of Time.

TWO QUATRAINS

I

As eons of incalculable strife
Are in the vision of one moment caught,
So are the common, concrete things of life
Divinely shadowed on the walls of Thought.

II

We shriek to live, but no man ever lives
Till he has rid the ghost of human breath;
We dream to die, but no man ever dies
Till he has quit the road that runs to death.

THE TORRENT

I found a torrent falling in a glen
Where the sun's light shone silvered and leaf-split;
The boom, the foam, and the mad flash of it
All made a magic symphony; but when
I thought upon the coming of hard men
To cut those patriarchal trees away,
And turn to gold the silver of that spray,
I shuddered. Yet a gladness now and then
Did wake me to myself till I was glad
In earnest, and was welcoming the time
For screaming saws to sound above the chime
Of idle waters, and for me to know
The jealous visionings that I had had
Were steps to the great place where trees and torrents go.

L'ENVOI

Now in a thought, now in a shadowed word,
Now in a voice that thrills eternity,
Ever there comes an onward phrase to me
Of some transcendent music I have heard;
No piteous thing by soft hands dulcimered,
No trumpet crash of blood-sick victory,
But a glad strain of some vast harmony
That no brief mortal touch has ever stirred.

There is no music in the world like this,
No character wherewith to set it down,
No kind of instrument to make it sing.
No kind of instrument? Ah, yes, there is;
And after time and place are overthrown,
God's touch will keep its one chord quivering.

CAPTAIN CRAIG, ETC.

(1902)

To the Memory of
John Hays Gardiner

CAPTAIN CRAIG

I

I doubt if ten men in all Tilbury Town
Had ever shaken hands with Captain Craig,
Or called him by his name, or looked at him
So curiously, or so concernedly,
As they had looked at ashes; but a few—
Say five or six of us—had found somehow
The spark in him, and we had fanned it there,
Choked under, like a jest in Holy Writ,
By Tilbury prudence. He had lived his life
And in his way had shared, with all mankind,
Inveterate leave to fashion of himself,
By some resplendent metamorphosis,
Whatever he was not. And after time,
When it had come sufficiently to pass
That he was going patch-clad through the streets,
Weak, dizzy, chilled, and half starved, he had laid
Some nerveless fingers on a prudent sleeve,

And told the sleeve, in furtive confidence,
Just how it was: "My name is Captain Craig,"
He said, "and I must eat." The sleeve moved on,
And after it moved others—one or two;
For Captain Craig, before the day was done,
Got back to the scant refuge of his bed
And shivered into it without a curse—
Without a murmur even. He was cold,
And old, and hungry; but the worst of it
Was a forlorn familiar consciousness
That he had failed again. There was a time
When he had fancied, if worst came to worst,
And he could do no more, that he might ask
Of whom he would. But once had been enough,
And soon there would be nothing more to ask.
He was himself, and he had lost the speed
He started with, and he was left behind.
There was no mystery, no tragedy;
And if they found him lying on his back
Stone dead there some sharp morning, as they might,—
Well, once upon a time there was a man—
Es war einmal ein König, if it pleased him.
And he was right: there were no men to blame:

There was just a false note in the Tilbury tune—
A note that able-bodied men might sound
Hosannas on while Captain Craig lay quiet.
They might have made him sing by feeding him
Till he should march again, but probably
Such yielding would have jeopardized the rhythm;
They found it more melodious to shout
Right on, with unmolested adoration,
To keep the tune as it had always been,
To trust in God, and let the Captain starve.

He must have understood that afterwards—
When we had laid some fuel to the spark
Of him, and oxidized it—for he laughed
Out loud and long at us to feel it burn,
And then, for gratitude, made game of us:
"You are the resurrection and the life,"
He said, "and I the hymn the Brahmin sings;
O Fuscus! and we'll go no more a-roving."
We were not quite accoutred for a blast
Of any lettered nonchalance like that,
And some of us—the five or six of us
Who found him out—were singularly struck.

But soon there came assurance of his lips,
Like phrases out of some sweet instrument
Man's hand had never fitted, that he felt
"No penitential shame for what had come,
No virtuous regret for what had been,—
But rather a joy to find it in his life
To be an outcast usher of the soul
For such as had good courage of the Sun
To pattern Love." The Captain had one chair;
And on the bottom of it, like a king,
For longer time than I dare chronicle,
Sat with an ancient ease and eulogized
His opportunity. My friends got out,
Like brokers out of Arcady; but I—
May be for fascination of the thing,
Or may be for the larger humor of it—
Stayed listening, unwearied and unstung.
When they were gone the Captain's tuneful ooze
Of rhetoric took on a change; he smiled
At me and then continued, earnestly:
"Your friends have had enough of it; but you,
For a motive hardly vindicated yet
By prudence or by conscience, have remained;

And that is very good, for I have things
To tell you: things that are not words alone—
Which are the ghosts of things—but something firmer.
First, would I have you know, for every gift
Or sacrifice, there are—or there may be—
Two kinds of gratitude: the sudden kind
We feel for what we take, the larger kind
We feel for what we give. Once we have learned
As much as this, we know the truth has been
Told over to the world a thousand times;—
But we have had no ears to listen yet
For more than fragments of it: we have heard
A murmur now and then, an echo here
And there, and we have made great music of it;
And we have made innumerable books
To please the Unknown God. Time throws away
Dead thousands of them, but the God that knows
No death denies not one: the books all count,
The songs all count; and yet God's music has
No modes, his language has no adjectives."

"You may be right, you may be wrong," said I;
"But what has this that you are saying now—

This nineteenth-century Nirvana-talk—
To do with you and me?" The Captain raised
His hand and held it westward, where a patched
And unwashed attic-window filtered in
What barren light could reach us, and then said,
With a suave, complacent resonance: "There shines
The sun. Behold it. We go round and round,
And wisdom comes to us with every whirl
We count throughout the circuit. We may say
The child is born, the boy becomes a man,
The man does this and that, and the man goes,—
But having said it we have not said much,
Not very much. Do I fancy, or you think,
That it will be the end of anything
When I am gone? There was a soldier once
Who fought one fight and in that fight fell dead.
Sad friends went after, and they brought him home
And had a brass band at his funeral,
As you should have at mine; and after that
A few remembered him. But he was dead,
They said, and they should have their friend no more.—
However, there was once a starveling child—
A ragged-vested little incubus,

Born to be cuffed and frighted out of all
Capacity for childhood's happiness—
Who started out one day, quite suddenly,
To drown himself. He ran away from home,
Across the clover-fields and through the woods,
And waited on a rock above a stream,
Just like a kingfisher. He might have dived,
Or jumped, or he might not; but anyhow,
There came along a man who looked at him
With such an unexpected friendliness,
And talked with him in such a common way,
That life grew marvelously different:
What he had lately known for sullen trunks
And branches, and a world of tedious leaves,
Was all transmuted; a faint forest wind
That once had made the loneliest of all
Sad sounds on earth, made now the rarest music;
And water that had called him once to death
Now seemed a flowing glory. And that man,
Born to go down a soldier, did this thing.
Not much to do? Not very much, I grant you:
Good occupation for a sonneteer,
Or for a clown, or for a clergyman,

But small work for a soldier. By the way,
When you are weary sometimes of your own
Utility, I wonder if you find
Occasional great comfort pondering
What power a man has in him to put forth?
'Of all the many marvelous things that are,
Nothing is there more marvelous than man,'
Said Sophocles; and he lived long ago;
'And earth, unending ancient of the gods
He furrows; and the ploughs go back and forth,
Turning the broken mould, year after year.' . . .

"I turned a little furrow of my own
Once on a time, and everybody laughed—
As I laughed afterwards; and I doubt not
The First Intelligence, which we have drawn
In our competitive humility
As if it went forever on two legs,
Had some diversion of it: I believe
God's humor is the music of the spheres—
But even as we draft omnipotence
Itself to our own image, we pervert
The courage of an infinite ideal

To finite resignation. You have made
The cement of your churches out of tears
And ashes, and the fabric will not stand:
The shifted walls that you have coaxed and shored
So long with unavailing compromise
Will crumble down to dust and blow away,
And younger dust will follow after them;
Though not the faintest or the farthest whirled
First atom of the least that ever flew
Shall be by man defrauded of the touch
God thrilled it with to make a dream for man
When Science was unborn. And after time,
When we have earned our spiritual ears,
And art's commiseration of the truth
No longer glorifies the singing beast,
Or venerates the clinquant charlatan,—
Then shall at last come ringing through the sun,
Through time, through flesh, a music that is true.
For wisdom is that music, and all joy
That wisdom:—you may counterfeit, you think,
The burden of it in a thousand ways;
But as the bitterness that loads your tears
Makes Dead Sea swimming easy, so the gloom,

The penance, and the woeful pride you keep,
Make bitterness your buoyance of the world.
And at the fairest and the frenziedest
Alike of your God-fearing festivals,
You so compound the truth to pamper fear
That in the doubtful surfeit of your faith
You clamor for the food that shadows eat.
You call it rapture or deliverance,—
Passion or exaltation, or what most
The moment needs, but your faint-heartedness
Lives in it yet: you quiver and you clutch
For something larger, something unfulfilled,
Some wiser kind of joy that you shall have
Never, until you learn to laugh with God."
And with a calm Socratic patronage,
At once half sombre and half humorous,
The Captain reverently twirled his thumbs
And fixed his eyes on something far away;
Then, with a gradual gaze, conclusive, shrewd,
And at the moment unendurable
For sheer beneficence, he looked at me.

"But the brass band?" I said, not quite at ease
With altruism yet.—He made a sort

Of reminiscent little inward noise,
Midway between a chuckle and a laugh,
And that was all his answer: not a word
Of explanation or suggestion came
From those tight-smiling lips. And when I left,
I wondered, as I trod the creaking snow
And had the world-wide air to breathe again,—
Though I had seen the tremor of his mouth
And honored the endurance of his hand—
Whether or not, securely closeted
Up there in the stived haven of his den,
The man sat laughing at me; and I felt
My teeth grind hard together with a quaint
Revulsion—as I recognize it now—
Not only for my Captain, but as well
For every smug-faced failure on God's earth;
Albeit I could swear, at the same time,
That there were tears in the old fellow's eyes.
I question if in tremors or in tears
There be more guidance to man's worthiness
Than—well, say in his prayers. But oftentimes
It humors us to think that we possess
By some divine adjustment of our own

Particular shrewd cells, or something else,
What others, for untutored sympathy,
Go spirit-fishing more than half their lives
To catch—like cheerful sinners to catch faith;
And I have not a doubt but I assumed
Some egotistic attribute like this
When, cautiously, next morning I reduced
The fretful qualms of my novitiate,
For most part, to an undigested pride.
Only, I live convinced that I regret
This enterprise no more than I regret
My life; and I am glad that I was born.

That evening, at "The Chrysalis," I found
The faces of my comrades all suffused
With what I chose then to denominate
Superfluous good feeling. In return,
They loaded me with titles of odd form
And unexemplified significance,
Like "Bellows-mender to Prince Æolus,"
"Pipe-filler to the Hoboscholiast,"
"Bread-fruit for the Non-Doing," with one more
That I remember, and a dozen more

That I forget. I may have been disturbed,
I do not say that I was not annoyed,
But something of the same serenity
That fortified me later made me feel
For their skin-pricking arrows not so much
Of pain as of a vigorous defect
In this world's archery. I might have tried,
With a flat facetiousness, to demonstrate
What they had only snapped at and thereby
Made out of my best evidence no more
Than comfortable food for their conceit;
But patient wisdom frowned on argument,
With a side nod for silence, and I smoked
A series of incurable dry pipes
While Morgan fiddled, with obnoxious care,
Things that I wished he wouldn't. Killigrew,
Drowsed with a fond abstraction, like an ass,
Lay blinking at me while he grinned and made
Remarks. The learned Plunket made remarks.

It may have been for smoke that I cursed cats
That night, but I have rather to believe
As I lay turning, twisting, listening,

And wondering, between great sleepless yawns,
What possible satisfaction those dead leaves
Could find in sending shadows to my room
And swinging them like black rags on a line,
That I, with a forlorn clear-headedness
Was ekeing out probation. I had sinned
In fearing to believe what I believed,
And I was paying for it.—Whimsical,
You think,—factitious; but "there is no luck,
No fate, no fortune for us, but the old
Unswerving and inviolable price
Gets paid: God sells himself eternally,
But never gives a crust," my friend had said;
And while I watched those leaves, and heard those cats,
And with half mad minuteness analyzed
The Captain's attitude and then my own,
I felt at length as one who throws himself
Down restless on a couch when clouds are dark,
And shuts his eyes to find, when he wakes up
And opens them again, what seems at first
An unfamiliar sunlight in his room
And in his life—as if the child in him
Had laughed and let him see; and then I knew

Some prowling superfluity of child
In me had found the child in Captain Craig
And let the sunlight reach him. While I slept,
My thought reshaped itself to friendly dreams,
And in the morning it was with me still.

Through March and shifting April to the time
When winter first becomes a memory
My friend the Captain—to my other friend's
Incredulous regret that such as he
Should ever get the talons of his talk
So fixed in my unfledged credulity—
Kept up the peroration of his life,
Not yielding at a threshold, nor, I think,
Too often on the stairs. He made me laugh
Sometimes, and then again he made me weep
Almost; for I had insufficiency
Enough in me to make me know the truth
Within the jest, and I could feel it there
As well as if it were the folded note
I felt between my fingers. I had said
Before that I should have to go away
And leave him for the season; and his eyes

Had shone with well-becoming interest
At that intelligence. There was no mist
In them that I remember; but I marked
An unmistakable self-questioning
And a reticence of unassumed regret.
The two together made anxiety—
Not selfishness, I ventured. I should see
No more of him for six or seven months,
And I was there to tell him as I might
What humorous provision we had made
For keeping him locked up in Tilbury Town.
That finished—with a few more commonplace
Prosaics on the certified event
Of my return to find him young again—
I left him neither vexed, I thought, with us,
Nor over much at odds with destiny.
At any rate, save always for a look
That I had seen too often to mistake
Or to forget, he gave no other sign.
That train began to move; and as it moved,
I felt a comfortable sudden change
All over and inside. Partly it seemed
As if the strings of me had all at once

Gone down a tone or two; and even though
It made me scowl to think so trivial
A touch had owned the strength to tighten them,
It made me laugh to think that I was free.
But free from what—when I began to turn
The question round—was more than I could say:
I was no longer vexed with Killigrew,
Nor more was I possessed with Captain Craig;
But I was eased of some restraint, I thought,
Not qualified by those amenities,
And I should have to search the matter down;
For I was young, and I was very keen.
So I began to smoke a bad cigar
That Plunket, in his love, had given me
The night before; and as I smoked I watched
The flying mirrors for a mile or so,
Till to the changing glimpse, now sharp, now faint,
They gave me of the woodland over west,
A gleam of long-forgotten strenuous years
Came back, when we were Red Men on the trail,
With Morgan for the big chief Wocky-Bocky;
And yawning out of that I set myself
To face again the loud monotonous ride

That lay before me like a vista drawn
Of bag-racks to the fabled end of things.

II

Yet that ride had an end, as all rides have;
And the days coming after took the road
That all days take,—though never one of them
Went by but I got some good thought of it
For Captain Craig. Not that I pitied him,
Or nursed a mordant hunger for his presence;
But what I thought (what Killigrew still thinks)
An irremediable cheerfulness
Was in him and about the name of him,
And I fancy that it may be most of all
For cheer in them that I have saved his letters.
I like to think of him, and how he looked—
Or should have looked—in his renewed estate,
Composing them. They may be dreariness
Unspeakable to you that never saw
The Captain; but to five or six of us
Who knew him they are not so bad as that.
It may be we have smiled not always where
The text itself would seem to indicate

Responsive titillation on our part,—
Yet having smiled at all we have done well,
Knowing that we have touched the ghost of him.
He tells me that he thinks of nothing now
That he would rather do than be himself,
Wisely alive. So let us heed this man:—

"The world that has been old is young again,
The touch that faltered clings; and this is May.
So think of your decrepit pensioner
As one who cherishes the living light,
Forgetful of dead shadows. He may gloat,
And he may not have power in his arms
To make the young world move; but he has eyes
And ears, and he can read the sun. Therefore
Think first of him as one who vegetates
In tune with all the children who laugh best
And longest through the sunshine, though far off
Their laughter, and unheard; for 't is the child,
O friend, that with his laugh redeems the man.
Time steals the infant, but the child he leaves;
And we, we fighters over of old wars—
We men, we shearers of the Golden Fleece—

Were brutes without him,—brutes to tear the scars
Of one another's wounds and weep in them,
And then cry out on God that he should flaunt
For life such anguish and flesh-wretchedness.
But let the brute go roaring his own way:
We do not need him, and he loves us not.

"I cannot think of anything to-day
That I would rather do than be myself,
Primevally alive, and have the sun
Shine into me; for on a day like this,
When chaff-parts of a man's adversities
Are blown by quick spring breezes out of him—
When even a flicker of wind that wakes no more
Than a tuft of grass, or a few young yellow leaves,
Comes like the falling of a prophet's breath
On altar-flames rekindled of crushed embers,—
Then do I feel, now do I feel, within me
No dreariness, no grief, no discontent,
No twinge of human envy. But I beg
That you forego credentials of the past
For these illuminations of the present,
Or better still, to give the shadow justice,

You let me tell you something: I have yearned
In many another season for these days,
And having them with God's own pageantry
To make me glad for them,—yes, I have cursed
The sunlight and the breezes and the leaves
To think of men on stretchers or on beds,
Or on foul floors, things without shapes or names,
Made human with paralysis and rags;
Or some poor devil on a battle-field,
Left undiscovered and without the strength
To drag a maggot from his clotted mouth;
Or women working where a man would fall—
Flat-breasted miracles of cheerfulness
Made neuter by the work that no man counts
Until it waits undone; children thrown out
To feed their veins and souls on offal . . . Yes,
I have had half a mind to blow my brains out
Sometimes; and I have gone from door to door,
Ragged myself, trying to do something—
Crazy, I hope.—But what has this to do
With Spring? Because one half of humankind
Lives here in hell, shall not the other half
Do any more than just for conscience' sake

Be miserable? Is this the way for us
To lead these creatures up to find the light,—
Or to be drawn down surely to the dark
Again? Which is it? What does the child say?

"But let us not make riot for the child
Untaught, nor let us hold that we may read
The sun but through the shadow; nor, again,
Be we forgetful ever that we keep
The shadows on their side. For evidence,
I might go back a little to the days
When I had hounds and credit, and grave friends
To borrow my books and set wet glasses on them,
And other friends of all sorts, grave and gay,
Of whom one woman and one man stand out
From all the rest, this morning. The man said
One day, as we were riding, 'Now, you see,
There goes a woman cursed with happiness:
Beauty and wealth, health, horses,—everything
That she could ask, or we could ask, is hers,
Except an inward eye for the dim fact
Of what this dark world is. The cleverness

God gave her—or the devil—cautions her
That she must keep the china cup of life
Filled somehow, and she fills it—runs it over—
Claps her white hands while some one does the sopping
With fingers made, she thinks, for just that purpose,
Giggles and eats and reads and goes to church,
Makes pretty little penitential prayers,
And has an eighteen-carat crucifix
Wrapped up in chamois-skin. She gives enough,
You say; but what is giving like hers worth?
What is a gift without the soul to guide it?
"Poor dears, and they have cancers?—Oh!" she says;
And away she works at that new altar-cloth
For the Reverend Hieronymus Mackintosh—
Third person, Jerry. "Jerry," she says, "can say
Such lovely things, and make life seem so sweet!"
Jerry can drink, also.—And there she goes,
Like a whirlwind through an orchard in the springtime—
Throwing herself away as if she thought
The world and the whole planetary circus
Were a flourish of apple-blossoms. Look at her!
And here is this infernal world of ours—
And hers, if only she might find it out—

Starving and shrieking, sickening, suppurating,
Whirling to God knows where . . . But look at her!'

"And after that it came about somehow,
Almost as if the Fates were killing time,
That she, the spendthrift of a thousand joys,
Rode in her turn with me, and in her turn
Made observations: 'Now there goes a man,'
She said, 'who feeds his very soul on poison:
No matter what he does, or where he looks,
He finds unhappiness; or, if he fails
To find it, he creates it, and then hugs it:
Pygmalion again for all the world—
Pygmalion gone wrong. You know I think
If when that precious animal was young,
His mother, or some watchful aunt of his,
Had spanked him with *Pendennis* and *Don Juan*,
And given him the *Lady of the Lake*,
Or *Cord and Creese*, or almost anything,
There might have been a tonic for him? Listen:
When he was possibly nineteen years old
He came to me and said, "I understand
You are in love "—yes, that is what he said,—

"But never mind, it won't last very long;
It never does; we all get over it.
We have this clinging nature, for you see
The Great Bear shook himself once on a time
And the world is one of many that let go."
And yet the creature lives, and there you see him
And he would have this life no fairer thing
Than a certain time for numerous marionettes
To do the Dance of Death. Give him a rose,
And he will tell you it is very sweet,
But only for a day. Most wonderful!
Show him a child, or anything that laughs,
And he begins at once to crunch his wormwood
And then runs on with his "realities."
What does he know about realities,
Who sees the truth of things almost as well
As Nero saw the Northern Lights? Good gracious!
Can't you do something with him? Call him something—
Call him a type, and that will make him cry:
One of those not at all unusual,
Prophetic, would-be-Delphic manger-snappers
That always get replaced when they are gone;
Or one of those impenetrable men,

Who seem to carry branded on their foreheads,
"We are abstruse, but not quite so abstruse
As possibly the good Lord may have wished;
One of those men who never quite confess
That Washington was great;—the kind of man
That everybody knows and always will,—
Shrewd, critical, facetious, insincere,
And for the most part harmless, I'm afraid.
But even then, you might be doing well
To tell him something.'—And I said I would.
So in one afternoon you see we have
The child in absence—or, to say the least,
In ominous defect,—and in excess
Commensurate, likewise. Now the question is,
Not which was right and which was wrong, for each,
By virtue of one-sidedness, was both;
But rather—to my mind, as heretofore—
Is it better to be blinded by the lights,
Or by the shadows? By the lights, you say?
The shadows are all devils, and the lights
Gleam guiding and eternal? Very good;
But while you say so do not quite forget
That sunshine has a devil of its own,

And one that we, for the great craft of him,
But vaguely recognize. The marvel is
That this persuasive and especial devil,
By grace of his extreme transparency,
Precludes all common vision of him; yet
There is one way to glimpse him and a way,
As I believe, to test him,—granted once
That we have ousted prejudice, which means
That we have made magnanimous advance
Through self-acquaintance. Not an easy thing
For some of us; impossible, may be,
For most of us: the woman and the man
I cited, for example, would have wrought
The most intractable conglomerate
Of everything, if they had set themselves
To analyze themselves and not each other;
If only for the sake of self-respect,
They would have come to no place but the same
Wherefrom they started; one would have lived awhile
In paradise without defending it,
And one in hell without enjoying it;
And each had been dissuaded neither more
Nor less thereafter. There are such on earth

As might have been composed primarily
For mortal warning: he was one of them,
And she—the devil makes us hesitate.
'T is easy to read words writ well with ink
That makes a good black mark on smooth white paper;
But words are done sometimes with other ink
Whereof the smooth white paper gives no sign
Till science brings it out; and here we come
To knowledge, and the way to test a devil.

"To most of us, you say, and you say well,
This demon of the sunlight is a stranger;
But if you break the sunlight of yourself,
Project it, and observe the quaint shades of it,
I have a shrewd suspicion you may find
That even as a name lives unrevealed
In ink that waits an agent, so it is
The devil—or this devil—hides himself
To all the diagnoses we have made
Save one. The quest of him is hard enough—
As hard as truth; but once we seem to know
That his compound obsequiousness prevails
Unferreted within us, we may find

That sympathy, which aureoles itself
To superfluity from you and me,
May stand against the soul for five or six
Persistent and indubitable streaks
Of irritating brilliance, out of which
A man may read, if he have knowledge in him,
Proportionate attest of ignorance,
Hypocrisy, good-heartedness, conceit,
Indifference,—by which a man may learn
That even courage may not make him glad
For laughter when that laughter is itself
The tribute of recriminating groans.
Nor are the shapes of obsolescent creeds
Much longer to flit near enough to make
Men glad for living in a world like this;
For wisdom, courage, knowledge, and the faith
Which has the soul and is the soul of reason—
These are the world's achievers. And the child—
The child that is the saviour of all ages,
The prophet and the poet, the crown-bearer,
Must yet with Love's unhonored fortitude,
Survive to cherish and attain for us
The candor and the generosity,

By leave of which we smile if we bring back
The first revealing flash that wakened us
When wisdom like a shaft of dungeon-light
Came searching down to find us.

"Halfway back
I made a mild allusion to the Fates,
Not knowing then that ever I should have
Dream-visions of them, painted on the air,—
Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos. Faint-hued
They seem, but with a faintness never fading,
Unblurred by gloom, unshattered by the sun,
Still with eternal color, colorless,
They move and they remain. The while I write
These very words I see them,—Atropos,
Lachesis, Clotho; and the last is laughing.
When Clotho laughs, Atropos rattles her shears;
But Clotho keeps on laughing just the same.
Some time when I have dreamed that Atropos
Has laughed, I'll tell you how the colors change—
The colors that are changeless, colorless."
I fear I may have answered Captain Craig's
Epistle Number One with what he chose,

Good-humoredly but anxiously, to take
For something that was not all reverence;
From Number Two it would have seemed almost
As if the flanges of the old man's faith
Had slipped the treacherous rails of my allegiance,
Leaving him by the roadside, humorously
Upset, with nothing more convivial
To do than be facetious and austere:—

"If you decry *Don César de Bazan,*
There is an imperfection in your vitals.
Flamboyant and old-fashioned? Overdone?
Romantico-robustious?—Dear young man,
There are fifteen thousand ways to be one-sided,
And I have indicated two of them
Already. Now you bait me with a third—
As if it were a spider with nine legs;
But what it is that you would have me do,
What fatherly wrath you most anticipate,
I lack the needed impulse to discern;
Though I who shape no songs of any sort,
I who have made no music, thrilled no canvas,—
I who have added nothing to the world

The world would reckon save long-squandered wit—
Might with half-pardonable reverence
Beguile my faith, maybe, to the forlorn
Extent of some sequestered murmuring
Anent the vanities. No doubt I should,
If mine were the one life that I have lived;
But with a few good glimpses I have had
Of heaven through the little holes in hell,
I can half understand what price it is
The poet pays, at one time and another,
For those indemnifying interludes
That are to be the kernel in what lives
To shrine him when the new-born men come singing.

"So do I comprehend what I have read
From even the squeezed items of account
Which I have to my credit in that book
Whereof the leaves are ages and the text
Eternity. What do I care to-day
For pages that have nothing? I have lived,
And I have died, and I have lived again;
And I am very comfortable. Yes,
Though I look back through barren years enough

To make me seem—as I transmute myself
In downward retrospect from what I am—
As unproductive and as unconvinced
Of living bread and the soul's eternal draught
As a frog on a Passover-cake in a streamless desert,—
Still do I trust the light that I have earned,
And having earned, received. You shake your head,
But do not say that you will shake it off.

"Meanwhile I have the flowers and the grass,
My brothers here the trees, and all July
To make me joyous. Why do you shake your head?
Why do you laugh?—because you are so young?
Do you think if you laugh hard enough the truth
Will go to sleep? Do you think of any couch
Made soft enough to put the truth to sleep?
Do you think there are no proper comedies
But yours that have the fashion? For example,
Do you think that I forget, or shall forget,
One friendless, fat, fantastic nondescript
Who knew the ways of laughter on low roads,—
A vagabond, a drunkard, and a sponge,
But always a free creature with a soul?

I bring him back, though not without misgivings,
And caution you to damn him sparingly.

"Count Pretzel von Würzburger, the Obscene
(The beggar may have had another name,
But no man to my knowledge ever knew it)
Was a poet and a skeptic and a critic,
And in his own mad manner a musician:
He found an old piano in a bar-room,
And it was his career—three nights a week,
From ten o'clock till twelve—to make it rattle;
And then, when I was just far down enough
To sit and watch him with his long straight hair,
And pity him, and think he looked like Liszt,
I might have glorified a musical
Steam-engine, or a xylophone. The Count
Played half of everything and 'improvised'
The rest: he told me once that he was born
With a genius in him that 'prohibited
Complete fidelity,' and that his art
'Confessed vagaries,' therefore. But I made
Kind reckoning of his vagaries then:
I had the whole great pathos of the man

To purify me, and all sorts of music
To give me spiritual nourishment
And cerebral athletics; for the Count
Played indiscriminately—with an *f*,
And with incurable presto—cradle-songs
And carnivals, spring-songs and funeral marches,
The Marseillaise and Schubert's Serenade—
And always in a way to make me think
Procrustes had the germ of music in him.
And when this interesting reprobate
Began to talk—then there were more vagaries:
He made a reeking fetich of all filth,
Apparently; but there was yet revealed
About him, through his words and on his flesh,
That ostracizing nimbus of a soul's
Abject, apologetic purity—
That phosphorescence of sincerity—
Which indicates the curse and the salvation
Of a life wherein starved art may never perish.

"One evening I remember clearliest
Of all that I passed with him. Having wrought,
With his nerve-ploughing ingenuity,

The *Traumerei* into a Titan's nightmare,
The man sat down across the table from me
And all at once was ominously decent.
' "The more we measure what is ours to use,"'
He said then, wiping his froth-plastered mouth
With the inside of his hand, '"the less we groan
For what the gods refuse." I've had that sleeved
A decade for you. Now but one more stein,
And I shall be prevailed upon to read
The only sonnet I have ever made;
And after that, if you propitiate
Gambrinus, I shall play you that Andante
As the world has never heard it played before.'
So saying, he produced a piece of paper,
Unfolded it, and read, 'SONNET UNIQUE
DE PRETZEL VON WURZBURGER, DIT L'OBSCÉNE:—

"'*Carmichael had a kind of joke-disease,*
And he had queer things fastened on his wall.
There are three green china frogs that I recall
More potently than anything, for these
Three frogs have demonstrated, by degrees,
What curse was on the man to make him fall:

"They are not ordinary frogs at all,
They are the Frogs of Aristophanes."

"'God! how he laughed whenever he said that;
And how we caught from one another's eyes
The flash of what a tongue could never tell!
We always laughed at him, no matter what
The joke was worth. But when a man's brain dies,
We are not always glad . . . Poor Carmichael!'

"'I am a sowbug and a necrophile,'
Said Pretzel, 'and the gods are growing old;
The stars are singing *Golden hair to gray,*
Green leaf to yellow leaf,—or chlorophyl
To xanthophyl, to be more scientific,—
So speed me one more stein. You may believe
That I'm a mendicant, but I am not:
For though it look to you that I go begging,
The truth is I go giving—giving all
My strength and all my personality,
My wisdom and experience—all myself,
To make it final—for your preservation;
Though I be not the one thing or the other,

Though I strike between the sunset and the dawn,
Though I be cliff-rubbed wreckage on the shoals
Of Circumstance,—doubt not that I comprise,
Far more than my appearance. Here he comes;
Now drink to good old Pretzel! Drink down Pretzel!
Quousque tandem, Pretzel, and O Lord,
How long! But let regret go hang: the good
Die first, and of the poor did many cease
To be. Beethoven after Wordsworth. *Prosit!*
There were geniuses among the trilobites,
And I suspect that I was one of them.'
"How much of him was earnest and how much
Fantastic, I know not; nor do I need
Profounder knowledge to exonerate
The squalor or the folly of a man
Than consciousness—though even the crude laugh
Of indigent Priapus follow it—
That I get good of him. And if you like him,
Then some time in the future, past a doubt,
You'll have him in a book, make metres of him,—
To the great delight of Mr. Killigrew,
And the grief of all your kinsmen. Christian shame
And self-confuted Orientalism

For the more sagacious of them; vulture-tracks
Of my Promethean bile for the rest of them;
And that will be a joke. There's nothing quite
So funny as a joke that's lost on earth
And laughed at by the gods. Your devil knows it.

"I come to like your Mr. Killigrew,
And I rejoice that you speak well of him.
The sprouts of human blossoming are in him,
And useful eyes—if he will open them;
But one thing ails the man. He smiles too much.
He comes to see me once or twice a week,
And I must tell him that he smiles too much.
If I were Socrates, it would be simple."

Epistle Number Three was longer coming.
I waited for it, even worried for it—
Though Killigrew, and of his own free will,
Had written reassuring little scraps
From time to time, and I had valued them
The more for being his. "The Sage," he said,
"From all that I can see, is doing well—
I should say very well. Three meals a day,

Siestas, and innumerable pipes—
Not to the tune of water on the stones,
But rather to the tune of his own Ego,
Which seems to be about the same as God.
But I was always weak in metaphysics,
And pray therefore that you be lenient.
I'm going to be married in December,
And I have made a poem that will scan—
So Plunket says. You said the other wouldn't:

"Augustus Plunket, Ph.D.,
And oh, the Bishop's daughter;
A very learned man was he
And in twelve weeks he got her;

And oh, she was as fair to see
As pippins on the pippin tree . . .
Tu, tui, tibi, te,—chubs in the mill water.

"Connotative, succinct, and erudite;
Three dots to boot. Now goodman Killigrew
May wind an epic one of these glad years,
And after that who knoweth but the Lord—
The Lord of Hosts who is the King of Glory?"

Still, when the Captain's own words were before me,
I seemed to read from them, or into them,
The protest of a mortuary joy
Not all substantiating Killigrew's
Off-hand assurance. The man's face came back
The while I read them, and that look again,
Which I had seen so often, came back with it.
I do not know that I can say just why,
But I felt the feathery touch of something wrong:—

"Since last I wrote—and I fear weeks have gone
Too far for me to leave my gratitude
Unuttered for its own acknowledgment—
I have won, without the magic of Amphion
Without the songs of Orpheus or Apollo,
The frank regard—and with it, if you like,
The fledged respect—of three quick-footed friends.
('Nothing is there more marvelous than man,'
Said Sophocles; and I say after him:
'He traps and captures, all-inventive one,
The light birds and the creatures of the wold,
And in his nets the fishes of the sea.')
Once they were pictures, painted on the air,

Faint with eternal color, colorless,—
But now they are not pictures, they are fowls.

"At first they stood aloof and cocked their small,
Smooth, prudent heads at me and made as if,
With a cryptic idiotic melancholy,
To look authoritative and sagacious;
But when I tossed a piece of apple to them,
They scattered back with a discord of short squawks
And then came forward with a craftiness
That made me think of Eden. Atropos
Came first, and having grabbed the morsel up,
Ran flapping far away and out of sight,
With Clotho and Lachesis hard after her;
But finally the three fared all alike,
And next day I persuaded them with corn.
In a week they came and had it from my fingers
And looked up at me while I pinched their bills
And made them sneeze. Count Pretzel's Carmichael
Had said they were not ordinary birds
At all,—and they are not: they are the Fates,
Foredoomed of their own insufficiency
To be assimilated.—Do not think,

Because in my contented isolation
It suits me at this time to be jocose,
That I am nailing reason to the cross,
Or that I set the bauble and the bells
Above the crucible; for I do nought,
Say nought, but with an ancient levity
That is the forbear of all earnestness.

"The cross, I said.—I had a dream last night:
A dream not like to any other dream
That I remember. I was all alone,
Sitting as I do now beneath a tree,
But looking not, as I am looking now,
Against the sunlight. There was neither sun
Nor moon, nor do I think of any stars;
Yet there was light, and there were cedar trees,
And there were sycamores. I lay at rest,
Or should have seemed at rest, within a trough
Between two giant roots. A weariness
Was on me, and I would have gone to sleep,
But I had not the courage. If I slept,
I feared that I should never wake again;

And if I did not sleep I should go mad,
And with my own dull tools, which I had used
With wretched skill so long, hack out my life.
And while I lay there, tortured out of death,
Faint waves of cold, as if the dead were breathing,
Came over me and through me; and I felt
Quick fearful tears of anguish on my face
And in my throat. But soon, and in the distance,
Concealed, importunate, there was a sound
Of coming steps,—and I was not afraid;
No, I was not afraid then, I was glad;
For I could feel, with every thought, the Man,
The Mystery, the Child, a footfall nearer.
Then, when he stood before me, there was no
Surprise, there was no questioning: I knew him,
As I had known him always; and he smiled.
'Why are you here?' he asked; and reaching down,
He took up my dull blades and rubbed his thumb
Across the edges of them and then smiled
Once more.—'I was a carpenter,' I said,
'But there was nothing in the world to do.'—
'Nothing?' said he.—'No, nothing,' I replied.—
'But are you sure,' he asked, 'that you have skill?

And are you sure that you have learned your trade?
No, you are not.'—He looked at me and laughed
As he said that; but I did not laugh then,
Although I might have laughed.—'They are dull,' said he;
'They were not very sharp if they were ground;
But they are what you have, and they will earn
What you have not. So take them as they are,
Grind them and clean them, put new handles to them,
And then go learn your trade in Nazareth.
Only be sure that you find Nazareth.'—
'But if I starve—what then?' said I.—He smiled.

"Now I call that as curious a dream
As ever Meleager's mother had,—
Æneas, Alcibiades, or Jacob.
I'll not except the scientist who dreamed
That he was Adam and that he was Eve
At the same time; or yet that other man
Who dreamed that he was Æschylus, reborn
To clutch, combine, compensate, and adjust
The plunging and unfathomable chorus
Wherein we catch, like a bacchanale through thunder,

The chanting of the new Eumenides,
Implacable, renascent, farcical,
Triumphant, and American. He did it,
But did it in a dream. When he awoke
One phrase of it remained; one verse of it
Went singing through the remnant of his life
Like a bag-pipe through a mad-house.—He died young,
And if I ponder the small history
That I have gleaned of him by scattered roads,
The more do I rejoice that he died young.
That measure would have chased him all his days,
Defeated him, deposed him, wasted him,
And shrewdly ruined him—though in that ruin
There would have lived, as always it has lived,
In ruin as in failure, the supreme
Fulfillment unexpressed, the rhythm of God
That beats unheard through songs of shattered men
Who dream but cannot sound it.—He declined,
From all that I have ever learned of him,
With absolute good-humor. No complaint,
No groaning at the burden which is light,
No brain-waste of impatience—'Never mind,'
He whispered, 'for I might have written Odes.'

"Speaking of odes now makes me think of ballads.
Your admirable Mr. Killigrew
Has latterly committed what he calls
A Ballad of London—London 'Town,' of course—
And he has wished that I pass judgment on it;
He says there is a 'generosity'
About it, and a 'sympathetic insight;'
And there are strong lines in it, so he says.
But who am I that he should make of me
A judge? You are his friend, and you know best
The measure of his jingle. I am old,
And you are young. Be sure, I may go back
To squeak for you the tunes of yesterday
On my old fiddle—or what's left of it—
And give you as I'm able a young sound;
But all the while I do it I remain
One of Apollo's pensioners (and yours),
An usher in the Palace of the Sun,
A candidate for mattocks and trombones
(The brass-band will be indispensable),
A patron of high science, but no critic.
So I shall have to tell him, I suppose,
That I read nothing now but Wordsworth, Pope,

Lucretius, Robert Burns, and William Shakespeare
Now this is Mr. Killigrew's performance:

" '*Say, do you go to London Town,*
You with the golden feather?'—
'*And if I go to London Town*
With my golden feather?'—
'*These autumn roads are bright and brown,*
The season wears a russet crown;
And if you go to London Town,
We'll go down together.'

"I cannot say for certain, but I think
The brown bright nightingale was half assuaged
Before your Mr. Killigrew was born.
If I have erred in my chronology,
No matter,—for the feathered man sings now:

" '*Yes, I go to London Town*'
(*Merrily waved the feather*),
'*And if you go to London Town,*
Yes, we'll go together,'
So in the autumn bright and brown,

Just as the year began to frown,
All the way to London Town
Rode the two together.

" '*I go to marry a fair maid*'
(*Lightly swung the feather*)—
'*Pardie, a true and loyal maid*'
(*Oh, the swinging feather!*)—
'*For us the wedding gold is weighed,*
For us the feast will soon be laid;
We'll make a gallant show,' *he said,*—
'*She and I together.*'

"The feathered man may do a thousand things,
And all go smiling; but the feathered man
May do too much. Now mark how he continues:

" '*And you—you go to London Town?*'
(*Breezes waved the feather*)—
'*Yes, I go to London Town.*'
(*Ah, the stinging feather!*)—
'*Why do you go, my merry blade?*
Like me, to marry a fair maid?'—

'Why do I go? . . . God knows,' he said;
And on they rode together.

"Now you have read it through, and you know best
What worth it has. We fellows with gray hair
Who march with sticks to music that is gray
Judge not your vanguard fifing. You are one
To judge; and you will tell me what you think.
Barring the Town, the Fair Maid, and the Feather,
The dialogue and those parentheses,
You cherish it, undoubtedly. 'Pardie!'
You call it, with a few conservative
Allowances, an excellent small thing
For patient inexperience to do:
Derivative, you say,—still rather pretty.
But what is wrong with Mr. Killigrew?
Is he in love, or has he read Rossetti?—
Forgive me! I am old and garrulous . . .
When are you coming back to Tilbury Town?"

III

I found the old man sitting in his bed,
Propped up and uncomplaining. On a chair

Beside him was a dreary bowl of broth,
A magazine, some glasses, and a pipe.
"I do not light it nowadays," he said,
"But keep it for an antique influence
That it exerts, an aura that it sheds—
Like hautboys, or Provence. You understand:
The charred memorial defeats us yet,
But think you not for always. We are young,
And we are friends of time. Time that made smoke
Will drive away the smoke, and we shall know
The work that we are doing. We shall build
With embers of all shrines one pyramid,
And we shall have the most resplendent flame
From earth to heaven, as the old words go,
And we shall need no smoke . . . Why don't you laugh!"

I gazed into those calm, half-lighted eyes
And smiled at them with grim obedience.
He told me that I did it very well,
But added that I should undoubtedly
Do better in the future: "There is nothing,"
He said, "so beneficial in a sick-room
As a well-bred spontaneity of manner.

Your sympathetic scowl obtrudes itself,
And is indeed surprising. After death,
Were you to take it with you to your coffin
An unimaginative man might think
That you had lost your life in worrying
To find out what it was that worried you.
The ways of unimaginative men
Are singularly fierce . . . Why do you stand?
Sit here and watch me while I take this soup.
The doctor likes it, therefore it is good.

"The man who wrote the decalogue," pursued
The Captain, having swallowed four or five
Heroic spoonfuls of his lukewarm broth,
"Forgot the doctors. And I think sometimes
The man of Galilee (or, if you choose,
The men who made the sayings of the man)
Like Buddha, and the others who have seen,
Was to men's loss the Poet—though it be
The Poet only of him we revere,
The Poet we remember. We have put
The prose of him so far away from us,
The fear of him so crudely over us,

That I wondered—wondered."—Cautiously,
But yet as one were cautious in a dream,
He set the bowl down on the chair again,
Crossed his thin fingers, looked me in the face,
And looking smiled a little. "Go away,"
He said at last, "and let me go to sleep.
I told you I should eat, but I shall not.
To-morrow I shall eat; and I shall read
Some clauses of a jocund instrument
That I have been preparing here of late
For you and for the rest, assuredly.
'Attend the testament of Captain Craig:
Good citizens, good fathers and your sons,
Good mothers and your daughters.' I should say so.
Now go away and let me go to sleep."

I stood before him and held out my hand.
He took it, pressed it; and I felt again
The sick soft closing on it. He would not
Let go, but lay there, looking up to me
With eyes that had a sheen of water on them
And a faint wet spark within them. So he clung,
Tenaciously, with fingers icy warm,

And eyes too full to keep the sheen unbroken.
I looked at him. The fingers closed hard once,
And then fell down.—I should have left him then.

But when we found him the next afternoon,
My first thought was that he had made his eyes
Miraculously smaller. They were sharp
And hard and dry, and the spark in them was dry.
For a glance it all but seemed as if the man
Had artfully forsworn the brimming gaze
Of yesterday, and with a wizard strength
Inveigled in, reduced, and vitalized
The straw-shine of October; and had that
Been truth, we should have humored him no less,
Albeit he had fooled us,—for he said
That we had made him glad by coming to him.
And he was glad: the manner of his words
Revealed the source of them; and the gray smile
Which lingered like a twilight on his face
Told of its own slow fading that it held
The promise of the sun. Cadaverous,
God knows it was; and we knew it was honest.
"So you have come to hear the old man read

To you from his last will and testament:
Well, it will not be long—not very long—
So listen." He brought out from underneath
His pillow a new manuscript, and said,
"You have done well to come and hear me read
My testament. There are men in the world
Who say of me, if they remember me,
That I am poor;—and I believe the ways
Of certain men who never find things out
Are stranger than the way Lord Bacon wrote
Leviticus, and *Faust*." He fixed his eyes
Abstractedly on something far from us,
And with a look that I remembered well
Gazed hard the while we waited. But at length
He found himself and soon began to chant,
With a fitful shift at thin sonorousness
The jocund instrument; and had he been
Definitively parceling to us
All Kimberley and half of Ballarat,
The lordly quaver of his poor old words
Could not have been the more magniloquent.
No promise of dead carbon or of gold,
However, flashed in ambush to corrupt us:

"I, Captain Craig, abhorred iconoclast,
Sage-errant, favored of the Mysteries,
And self-reputed humorist at large,
Do now, confessed of my world-worshiping,
Time-questioning, sun-fearing, and heart-yielding,
Approve and unreservedly devise
To you and your assigns for evermore,
God's universe and yours. If I had won
What first I sought, I might have made you beam
By giving less; but now I make you laugh
By giving more than what had made you beam,
And it is well. No man has ever done
The deed of humor that God promises,
But now and then we know tragedians
Reform, and in denial too divine
For sacrifice, too firm for ecstasy,
Record in letters, or in books they write,
What fragment of God's humor they have caught,
What earnest of its rhythm; and I believe
That I, in having somewhat recognized
The formal measure of it, have endured
The discord of infirmity no less
Through fortune than by failure. What men lose,

Man gains; and what man gains reports itself
In losses we but vaguely deprecate,
So they be not for us;—and this is right,
Except that when the devil in the sun
Misguides us we go darkly where the shine
Misleads us, and we know not what we see:
We know not if we climb or if we fall;
And if we fly, we know not where we fly.

"And here do I insert an urging clause
For climbers and up-fliers of all sorts,
Cliff-climbers and high-fliers: Phaethon,
Bellerophon, and Icarus did each
Go gloriously up, and each in turn
Did famously come down—as you have read
In poems and elsewhere; but other men
Have mounted where no fame has followed them,
And we have had no sight, no news of them,
And we have heard no crash. The crash may count,
Undoubtedly, and earth be fairer for it;
Yet none save creatures out of harmony
Have ever, in their fealty to the flesh,
Made crashing an ideal. It is the flesh

That ails us, for the spirit knows no qualm,
No failure, no down-falling: so climb high,
And having set your steps regard not much
The downward laughter clinging at your feet,
Nor overmuch the warning; only know,
As well as you know dawn from lantern-light,
That far above you, for you, and within you,
There burns and shines and lives, unwavering
And always yours, the truth. Take on yourself
But your sincerity, and you take on
Good promise for all climbing; fly for truth,
And hell shall have no storm to crush your flight,
No laughter to vex down your loyalty.

"I think you may be smiling at me now—
And if I make you smile, so much the better;
For I would have you know that I rejoice
Always to see the thing that I would see—
The righteous thing, the wise thing. I rejoice
Always to think that any thought of mine,
Or any word or any deed of mine,
May grant sufficient of what fortifies
Good feeling and the courage of calm joy

To make the joke worth while. Contrariwise,
When I review some faces I have known—
Sad faces, hungry faces—and reflect
On thoughts I might have moulded, human words
I might have said, straightway it saddens me
To feel perforce that had I not been mute
And actionless, I might have made them bright
Somehow, though only for the moment. Yes,
Howbeit I may confess the vanities,
It saddens me; and sadness, of all things
Miscounted wisdom, and the most of all
When warmed with old illusions and regrets,
I mark the selfishest, and on like lines
The shrewdest. For your sadness makes you climb
With dragging footsteps, and it makes you groan;
It hinders you when most you would be free,
And there are many days it wearies you
Beyond the toil itself. And if the load
It lays on you may not be shaken off
Till you have known what now you do not know—
Meanwhile you climb; and he climbs best who sees
Above him truth burn faithfulest, and feels
Within him truth burn purest. Climb or fall.

One road remains and one firm guidance always;
One way that shall be taken, climb or fall.

"But 'falling, falling, falling.' There's your song,
The cradle-song that sings you to the grave.
What is it your bewildered poet says?—

" '*The toiling ocean thunders of unrest*
And aching desolation; the still sea
Paints but an outward calm that mocks itself
To the final and irrefragable sleep
That owns no shifting fury; and the shoals
Of ages are but records of regret
Where Time, the sun's arch-phantom, writes on sand
The prelude of his ancient nothingness.'

" 'T is easy to compound a dirge like that,
And it is easy too to be deceived
And alienated by the fleshless note
Of half-world yearning in it; but the truth
To which we all are tending,—charlatans
And architects alike, artificers
In tinsel as in gold, evangelists

Of ruin and redemption, all alike,—
The truth we seek and equally the truth
We do not seek, but yet may not escape,
Was never found alone through flesh contempt
Or through flesh reverence. Look east and west
And we may read the story: where the light
Shone first the shade now darkens; where the shade
Clung first, the light fights westward—though the shade
Still feeds, and there is yet the Orient.

"But there is this to be remembered always:
Whatever be the altitude you reach,
You do not rise alone; nor do you fall
But you drag others down to more or less
Than your preferred abasement. God forbid
That ever I should preach, and in my zeal
Forget that I was born an humorist;
But now, for once, before I go away,
I beg of you to be magnanimous
A moment, while I speak to please myself:

"Though I have heard it variously sung
That even in the fury and the clash

Of battles, and the closer fights of men
When silence gives the knowing world no sign,
One flower there is, though crushed and cursed it be,
Keeps rooted through all tumult and all scorn,—
Still do I find, when I look sharply down,
There's yet another flower that grows well
And has the most unconscionable roots
Of any weed on earth. Perennial
It grows, and has the name of Selfishness;
No doubt you call it Love. In either case,
You propagate it with a diligence
That hardly were outmeasured had its leaf
The very juice in it of that famed herb
Which gave back breath to Glaucus; and I know
That in the twilight, after the day's work,
You take your little children in your arms,
Or lead them by their credulous frail hands
Benignly out and through the garden-gate
And show them there the things that you have raised;
Not everything, perchance, but always one
Miraculously rooted flower plot
Which is your pride, their pattern. Socrates,
Could he be with you there at such a time,

Would have some unsolicited shrewd words
To say that you might hearken to; but I
Say nothing, for I am not Socrates.—
So much, good friends, for flowers; and I thank you.

"There was a poet once who would have roared
Away the world and had an end of stars.
Where was he when I quoted him?—oh, yes:
'T is easy for a man to link loud words
With woeful pomp and unschooled emphasis
And add one thundered contribution more
To the dirges of all-hallowness, I said;
But here again I find the question set
Before me, after turning books on books
And looking soulward through man after man,
If there indeed be more determining
Play-service in remotely sounding down
The world's one-sidedness. If I judge right,
Your pounding protestations, echoing
Their burden of unfraught futility,
Surge back to mute forgetfulness at last
And have a kind of sunny, sullen end,
Like any cold north storm.—But there are few

Still seas that have no life to profit them,
And even in such currents of the mind
As have no tide-rush in them, but are drowsed,
Crude thoughts may dart in armor and upspring
With waking sound, when all is dim with peace,
Like sturgeons in the twilight out of Lethe;
And though they be discordant, hard, grotesque,
And all unwelcome to the lethargy
That you think means repose, you know as well
As if your names were shouted when they leap,
And when they leap you listen.—Ah! friends, friends,
There are these things we do not like to know:
They trouble us, they make us hesitate,
They touch us, and we try to put them off.
We banish one another and then say
That we are left alone: the midnight leaf
That rattles where it hangs above the snow—
Gaunt, fluttering, forlorn—scarcely may seem
So cold in all its palsied loneliness
As we, we frozen brothers, who have yet
Profoundly and severely to find out
That there is more of unpermitted love
In most men's reticence than most men think.

"Once, when I made it out fond-headedness
To say that we should ever be apprised
Of our deserts and their emolument
At all but in the specious way of words,
The wisdom of a warm thought woke within me
And I could read the sun. Then did I turn
My long-defeated face full to the world,
And through the clouded warfare of it all
Discern the light. Through dusk that hindered it,
I found the truth, and for the first whole time
Knew then that we were climbing. Not as one
Who mounts along with his experience
Bound on him like an Old Man of the Sea—
Not as a moral pedant who drags chains
Of his unearned ideals after him
And always to the lead-like thud they make
Attunes a cold inhospitable chant
Of All Things Easy to the Non-Attached,—
But as a man, a scarred man among men,
I knew it, and I felt the strings of thought
Between us to pull tight the while I strove;
And if a curse came ringing now and then
To my defended ears, how could I know

The light that burned above me and within me,
And at the same time put on cap-and-bells
For such as yet were groping?"

Killigrew
Made there as if to stifle a small cough.
I might have kicked him, but regret forbade
The subtle admonition; and indeed
When afterwards I reprimanded him,
The fellow never knew quite what I meant.
I may have been unjust.—The Captain read
Right on, without a chuckle or a pause,
As if he had heard nothing:

"How, forsooth,
Shall any man, by curses or by groans,
Or by the laugh-jarred stillness of all hell,
Be so drawn down to servitude again
That on some backward level of lost laws
And undivined relations, he may know
No longer Love's imperative resource,
Firm once and his, well treasured then, but now
Too fondly thrown away? And if there come

But once on all his journey, singing down
To find him, the gold-throated forward call,
What way but one, what but the forward way,
Shall after that call guide him? When his ears
Have earned an inward skill to methodize
The clash of all crossed voices and all noises,
How shall he grope to be confused again,
As he has been, by discord? When his eyes
Have read the book of wisdom in the sun,
And after dark deciphered it on earth,
How shall he turn them back to scan some huge
Blood-lettered protest of bewildered men
That hunger while he feeds where they would starve
And all absurdly perish?"

Killigrew
Looked hard for a subtile object on the wall,
And, having found it, sighed. The Captain paused:
If he grew tedious, most assuredly
Did he crave pardon of us; he had feared
Beforehand that he might be wearisome,
But there was not much more of it, he said,—
No more than just enough. And we rejoiced

That he should look so kindly on us then.
("Commend me to a dying man's grimace
For absolute humor, always," Killigrew
Maintains; but I know better.)

"Work for them,
You tell me? Work the folly out of them?
Go back to them and teach them how to climb,
While you teach caterpillars how to fly?
You tell me that Alnaschar is a fool
Because he dreams? And what is this you ask?
I make him wise? I teach him to be still?
While you go polishing the Pyramids,
I hold Alnaschar's feet? And while you have
The ghost of Memnon's image all day singing,
I sit with aching arms and hardly catch
A few spilled echoes of the song of songs—
The song that I should have as utterly
For mine as other men should once have had
The sweetest a glad shepherd ever trilled
In Sharon, long ago? Is this the way
For me to do good climbing any more
Than Phaethon's? Do you think the golden tone

Of that far-singing call you all have heard
Means any more for you than you should be
Wise-heartedly, glad-heartedly yourselves?
Do this, there is no more for you to do;
And you have no dread left, no shame, no scorn.
And while you have your wisdom and your gold,
Songs calling, and the Princess in your arms,
Remember, if you like, from time to time,
Down yonder where the clouded millions go,
Your bloody-knuckled scullions are not slaves,
Your children of Alnaschar are not fools.

"Nor are they quite so foreign or far down
As you may think to see them. What you take
To be the cursedest mean thing that crawls
On earth is nearer to you than you know:
You may not ever crush him but you lose,
You may not ever shield him but you gain—
As he, with all his crookedness, gains with you.
Your preaching and your teaching, your achieving,
Your lifting up and your discovering,
Are more than often—more than you have dreamed—
The world-refracted evidence of what

Your dream denies. You cannot hide yourselves
In any multitude or solitude,
Or mask yourselves in any studied guise
Of hardness or of old humility,
But soon by some discriminating man—
Some humorist at large, like Socrates—
You get yourselves found out.—Now I should be
Found out without an effort. For example:
When I go riding, trimmed and shaved again,
Consistent, adequate, respectable,—
Some citizen, for curiosity,
Will ask of a good neighbor, 'What is this?'—
'It is the funeral of Captain Craig,'
Will be the neighbor's word.—'And who, good man,
Was Captain Craig?'—'He was an humorist;
And we are told that there is nothing more
For any man alive to say of him.'—
'There is nothing very strange in that,' says A;
'But the brass band? What has he done to be
Blown through like this by cornets and trombones?
And here you have this incompatible dirge—
Where are the jokes in that?'—Then B should say:
'Maintained his humor: nothing more or less.

The story goes that on the day before
He died—some say a week, but that's a trifle—
He said, with a subdued facetiousness,
"Play Handel, not Chopin; assuredly not
Chopin." '—He was indeed an humorist."

He made the paper fall down at arm's length;
And with a tension of half-quizzical
Benignity that made it hard for us,
He looked up—first at Morgan, then at me—
Almost, I thought, as if his eyes would ask
If we were satisfied; and as he looked,
The tremor of an old heart's weariness
Was on his mouth. He gazed at each of us,
But spoke no further word that afternoon.
He put away the paper, closed his eyes,
And went to sleep with his lips flickering;
And after that we left him.—At midnight
Plunket and I looked in; but he still slept,
And everything was going as it should.
The watchman yawned, rattled his newspaper,
And wondered what it was that ailed his lamp.

Next day we found the Captain wide awake,
Propped up, and searching dimly with a spoon
Through another dreary dish of chicken-broth,
Which he raised up to me, at my approach,
So fervently and so unconsciously,
That one could only laugh. He looked again
At each of us, and as he looked he frowned;
And there was something in that frown of his
That none of us had ever seen before.
"Kind friends," he said, "be sure that I rejoice
To know that you have come to visit me;
Be sure I speak with undisguised words
And earnest, when I say that I rejoice."
"But what the devil!" whispered Killigrew.
I kicked him, for I thought I understood.
The old man's eyes had glimmered wearily
At first, but now they glittered like to those
Of a glad fish. "Beyond a doubt," said he,
"My dream this morning was more singular
Than any other I have ever known.
Give me that I might live ten thousand years,
And all those years do nothing but have dreams,
I doubt me much if any one of them

Could be so quaint or so fantastical,
So pregnant, as a dream of mine this morning.
You may not think it any more than odd;
You may not feel—you cannot wholly feel—
How droll it was:—I dreamed that I found Hamlet—
Found him at work, drenched with an angry sweat,
Predestined, he declared with emphasis,
To root out a large weed on Lethe wharf;
And after I had watched him for some time,
I laughed at him and told him that no root
Would ever come the while he talked like that:
The power was not in him, I explained,
For such compound accomplishment. He glared
At me, of course,—next moment laughed at me,
And finally laughed with me. I was right,
And we had eisel on the strength of it:—
'They tell me that this water is not good,'
Said Hamlet, and you should have seen him smile.
Conceited? Pelion and Ossa?—pah . . .

"But anon comes in a crocodile. We stepped
Adroitly down upon the back of him,
And away we went to an undiscovered country—

A fertile place, but in more ways than one
So like the region we had started from,
That Hamlet straightway found another weed
And there began to tug. I laughed again,
Till he cried out on me and on my mirth,
Protesting all he knew: 'The Fates,' he said,
'Have ordered it that I shall have these roots.'
But all at once a dreadful hunger seized him,
And it was then we killed the crocodile—
Killed him and ate him. Washed with bisel down
That luckless reptile was, to the last morsel;
And there we were with flag-fens all around us,—
And there was Hamlet, at his task again,
Ridiculous. And while I watched his work,
The drollest of all changes came to pass.
The weed had snapped off just above the root,
Not warning him, and I was left alone.
The bubbles rose, and I laughed heartily
To think of him; I laughed when I woke up;
And when my soup came in I laughed again;
I think I may have laughed a little—no?—
Not when you came? . . . Why do you look like that?
You don't believe me? Crocodiles—why not?

Who knows what he has eaten in his life?
Who knows but I have eaten Atropos? . . .
'Briar and oak for a soldier's crown,' you say?
Provence? Oh, no . . . Had I been Socrates,
Count Pretzel would have been the King of Spain."

Now of all casual things we might have said
To make the matter smooth at such a time,
There may have been a few that we had found
Sufficient. Recollection fails, however,
To say that we said anything. We looked.
Had he been Carmichael, we might have stood
Like faithful hypocrites and laughed at him;
But the Captain was not Carmichael at all,
For the Captain had no frogs: he had the sun.
So there we waited, hungry for the word,—
Tormented, unsophisticated, stretched—
Till, with a drawl, to save us, Killigrew
Good-humoredly spoke out. The Captain fixed
His eyes on him with some severity.

"That was a funny dream, beyond a doubt,"
Said Killigrew;—"too funny to be laughed at;

Too humorous, we mean."—"Too humorous?"
The Captain answered; "I approve of that.
Proceed."—We were not glad for Killigrew.
"Well," he went on, " 't was only this. You see
My dream this morning was a droll one too:
I dreamed that a sad man was in my room,
Sitting, as I do now, beside the bed.
I questioned him, but he made no reply,—
Said not a word, but sang."—"Said not a word,
But sang," the Captain echoed. "Very good.
Now tell me what it was the sad man sang."
"Now that," said Killigrew, constrainedly,
And with a laugh that might have been left out,
"Is why I know it must have been a dream.
But there he was, and I lay in the bed
Like you; and I could see him just as well
As you see my right hand. And for the songs
He sang to me—there's where the dream part comes."

"You don't remember them?" the Captain said,
With a weary little chuckle; "very well,
I might have guessed it. Never mind your dream,
But let me go to sleep."—For a moment then

There was a frown on Killigrew's good face,
And then there was a smile. "Not quite," said he;
"The songs that he sang first were sorrowful,
And they were stranger than the man himself—
And he was very strange; but I found out,
Through all the gloom of him and of his music,
That a—say, well, say mystic cheerfulness,
Pervaded him; for slowly, as he sang,
There came a change, and I began to know
The method of it all. Song after song
Was ended; and when I had listened there
For hours—I mean for dream-hours—hearing him,
And always glad that I was hearing him,
There came another change—a great one. Tears
Rolled out at last like bullets from his eyes,
And I could hear them fall down on the floor
Like shoes; and they were always marking time
For the song that he was singing. I have lost
The greater number of his verses now,
But there are some, like these, that I remember:

" '*Ten men from Zanzibar,*
Black as iron hammers are,

Riding on a cable-car
Down to Crowley's theatre.' . . .

"Ten men?" the Captain interrupted there—
"Ten men, my Euthyphron? That is beautiful.
But never mind, I wish to go to sleep:
Tell Cebes that I wish to go to sleep. . . .
O ye of little faith, your golden plumes
Are like to drag . . . par-dee!"—We may have smiled
In after days to think how Killigrew
Had sacrificed himself to fight that silence,
But we were grateful to him, none the less;
And if we smiled, that may have been the reason.
But the good Captain for a long time then
Said nothing: he lay quiet—fast asleep,
For all that we could see. We waited there
Till each of us, I fancy, must have made
The paper on the wall begin to squirm,
And then got up to leave. My friends went out,
And I was going, when the old man cried:
"You leave me now—now it has come to this?
What have I done to make you go? Come back!
Come back!"

There was a quaver in his cry
That we shall not forget—reproachful, kind,
Indignant, piteous. It seemed as one
Marooned on treacherous tide-feeding sand
Were darkly calling over the still straits
Between him and irrevocable shores
Where now there was no lamp to fade for him,
No call to give him answer. We were there
Before him, but his eyes were not much turned
On us; nor was it very much to us
That he began to speak the broken words,
The scattered words, that he had left in him.

"So it has come to this? And what is this?
Death, do you call it? Death? And what is death?
Why do you look like that at me again?
Why do you shrink your brows and shut your lips?
If it be fear, then I can do no more
Than hope for all of you that you may find
Your promise of the sun; if it be grief
You feel, to think that this old face of mine
May never look at you and laugh again,

Then tell me why it is that you have gone
So long with me, and followed me so far,
And had me to believe you took my words
For more than ever misers did their gold?"

He listened, but his eyes were far from us—
Too far to make us turn to Killigrew,
Or search the futile shelves of our own thoughts
For golden-labeled insincerities
To make placebos of. The marrowy sense
Of slow November rain that splashed against
The shingles and the glass reminded us
That we had brought umbrellas. He continued:
"Oh, can it be that I, too credulous,
Have made myself believe that you believe
Yourselves to be the men that you are not?
I prove and I prize well your friendliness,
But I would have that your last look at me
Be not like this; for I would scan to-day
Strong thoughts on all your faces—no regret,
No still commiseration—oh, not that!—
No doubt, no fear. A man may be as brave

As Ajax in the fury of his arms,
And in the midmost warfare of his thoughts
Be frail as Paris . . . For the love, therefore,
That brothered us when we stood back that day
From Delium—the love that holds us now
More than it held us at Amphipolis—
Forget you not that he who in his work
Would mount from these low roads of measured shame
To tread the leagueless highway must fling first
And fling forevermore beyond his reach
The shackles of a slave who doubts the sun.
There is no servitude so fraudulent
As of a sun-shut mind; for 't is the mind
That makes you craven or invincible,
Diseased or puissant. The mind will pay
Ten thousand fold and be the richer then
To grant new service; but the world pays hard,
And accurately sickens till in years
The dole has found its end and there is left
What all of you are noting on all days
In these Athenian streets, where squandered men
Drag ruins of half-warriors to the grave—
Or to Hippocrates."

His head fell back,
And he lay still with wearied eyes half-closed.
We waited, but a few faint words yet stayed:
"Kind friends," he said, "friends I have known so long,
Though I have jested with you in time past,
Though I have stung your pride with epithets
Not all forbearing,—still, when I am gone,
Say Socrates wrought always for the best
And for the wisest end . . . Give me the cup!
The truth is yours, God's universe is yours . . .
Good-by . . . good citizens . . . give me the cup" . . .
Again we waited; and this time we knew
Those lips of his that would not flicker down
Had yet some fettered message for us there.
We waited, and we watched him, All at once,
With a faint flash, the clouded eyes grew clear,
And then we knew the man was coming back.
We watched him, and I listened. The man smiled
And looked about him—not regretfully,
Not anxiously; and when at last he spoke,
Before the long drowse came to give him peace,
One word was all he said. "Trombones," he said.

That evening, at "The Chrysalis" again,
We smoked and looked at one another's eyes,
And we were glad. The world had scattered ways
For us to take, we knew; but for the time
That one snug room where big beech logs roared smooth
Defiance to the cold rough rain outside
Sufficed. There were no scattered ways for us
That we could see just then, and we were glad:
We were glad to be on earth, and we rejoiced
No less for Captain Craig that he was gone.
We might, for his dead benefit, have run
The gamut of all human weaknesses
And uttered after-platitudes enough—
Wrecked on his own abstractions, and all such—
To drive away Gambrinus and the bead
From Bernard's ale; and I suppose we might
Have praised, accordingly, the Lord of Hosts
For letting us believe that we were not
The least and idlest of His handiwork.

So Plunket, who had knowledge of all sorts,
Yet hardly ever spoke, began to plink
O tu, Palermo!—quaintly, with his nails,—

On Morgan's fiddle, and at once got seized,
As if he were some small thing, by the neck.
Then the consummate Morgan, having told
Explicitly what hardship might accrue
To Plunket if he did that any more,
Made roaring chords and acrobatic runs—
And then, with his kind eyes on Killigrew,
Struck up the schoolgirls' march in *Lohengrin*,
So Killigrew might smile and stretch himself
And have to light his pipe. When that was done
We knew that Morgan, by the looks of him,
Was in the mood for almost anything
From Bach to Offenbach; and of all times
That he has ever played, that one somehow—
That evening of the day the Captain died—
Stands out like one great verse of a good song,
One strain that sings itself beyond the rest
For magic and a glamour that it has.

The ways have scattered for us, and all things
Have changed; and we have wisdom, I doubt not,
More fit for the world's work than we had then;
But neither parted roads nor cent per cent

May starve quite out the child that lives in us—
The Child that is the Man, the Mystery,
The Phœnix of the World. So, now and then,
That evening of the day the Captain died
Returns to us; and there comes always with it
The storm, the warm restraint, the fellowship,
The friendship and the firelight, and the fiddle.
So too there comes a day that followed it—
A windy, dreary day with a cold white shine,
Which only gummed the tumbled frozen ruts
That made us ache. The road was hard and long,
But we had what we knew to comfort us,
And we had the large humor of the thing
To make it advantageous; for men stopped
And eyed us on that road from time to time,
And on that road the children followed us;
And all along that road the Tilbury Band
Blared indiscreetly the Dead March in Saul.

ISAAC AND ARCHIBALD

(To Mrs. Henry Richards)

Isaac and Archibald were two old men.
I knew them, and I may have laughed at them
A little; but I must have honored them,
For they were old, and they were good to me.

I do not think of either of them now,
Without remembering, infallibly,
A journey that I made one afternoon
With Isaac to find out what Archibald
Was doing with his oats. It was high time
Those oats were cut, said Isaac; and he feared
That Archibald—well, he could never feel
Quite sure of Archibald. Accordingly
The good old man invited me—that is,
Permitted me—to go along with him;
And I, with a small boy's adhesiveness
To competent old age, got up and went.
I do not know that I cared overmuch
For Archibald's or anybody's oats,
But Archibald was quite another thing,

And Isaac yet another; and the world
Was wide, and there was gladness everywhere.
We walked together down the River Road
With all the warmth and wonder of the land
Around us, and the wayside flash of leaves,—
And Isaac said the day was glorious;
But somewhere at the end of the first mile
I found that I was figuring to find
How long those ancient legs of his would keep
The pace that he had set for them. The sun
Was hot, and I was ready to sweat blood;
But Isaac, for aught I could make of him,
Was cool to his hat-band. So I said then
With a dry gasp of affable despair,
Something about the scorching days we have
In August without knowing it sometimes;
But Isaac said the day was like a dream,
And praised the Lord, and talked about the breeze.
I made a fair confession of the breeze,
And crowded casually on his thought
The nearness of a profitable nook
That I could see. First I was half inclined
To caution him that he was growing old,

But something that was not compassion soon
Made plain the folly of all subterfuge.
Isaac was old, but not so old as that.

So I proposed, without an overture,
That we be seated in the shade a while,
And Isaac made no murmur. Soon the talk
Was turned on Archibald, and I began
To feel some premonitions of a kind
That only childhood knows; for the old man
Had looked at me and clutched me with his eye,
And asked if I had ever noticed things.
I told him that I could not think of them,
And I knew then, by the frown that left his face
Unsatisfied, that I had injured him.
"My good young friend," he said, "you cannot feel
What I have seen so long. You have the eyes—
Oh, yes—but you have not the other things:
The sight within that never will deceive,
You do not know—you have no right to know;
The twilight warning of experience,
The singular idea of loneliness,—
These are not yours. But they have long been mine,

And they have shown me now for seven years
That Archibald is changing. It is not
So much that he should come to his last hand,
And leave the game, and go the old way down;
But I have known him in and out so long,
And I have seen so much of good in him
That other men have shared and have not seen,
And I have gone so far through thick and thin,
Through cold and fire with him, that now it brings
To this old heart of mine an ache that you
Have not yet lived enough to know about.
But even unto you, and your boy's faith,
Your freedom, and your untried confidence,
A time will come to find out what it means
To know that you are losing what was yours,
To know that you are being left behind;
And then the long contempt of innocence—
God bless you, boy!—don't think the worse of it
Because an old man chatters in the shade—
Will all be like a story you have read
In childhood and remembered for the pictures.
And when the best friend of your life goes down,
When first you know in him the slackening

That comes, and coming always tells the end,—
Now in a common word that would have passed
Uncaught from any other lips than his,
Now in some trivial act of every day,
Done as he might have done it all along
But for a twinging little difference
That nips you like a squirrel's teeth—oh, yes,
Then you will understand it well enough.
But oftener it comes in other ways;
It comes without your knowing when it comes;
You know that he is changing, and you know
That he is going—just as I know now
That Archibald is going, and that I
Am staying. . . . Look at me, my boy,
And when the time shall come for you to see
That I must follow after him, try then
To think of me, to bring me back again,
Just as I was to-day. Think of the place
Where we are sitting now, and think of me—
Think of old Isaac as you knew him
When you set out with him in August once
To see old Archibald."—The words come back
Almost as Isaac must have uttered them,

And there comes with them a dry memory
Of something in my throat that would not move.

If you had asked me then to tell just why
I made so much of Isaac and the things
He said, I should have gone far for an answer;
For I knew it was not sorrow that I felt,
Whatever I may have wished it, or tried then
To make myself believe. My mouth was full
Of words, and they would have been comforting
To Isaac, spite of my twelve years, I think;
But there was not in me the willingness
To speak them out. Therefore I watched the ground;
And I was wondering what made the Lord
Create a thing so nervous as an ant,
When Isaac, with commendable unrest,
Ordained that we should take the road again—
For it was yet three miles to Archibald's,
And one to the first pump. I felt relieved
All over when the old man told me that;
I felt that he had stilled a fear of mine
That those extremities of heat and cold
Which he had long gone through with Archibald

Had made the man impervious to both;
But Isaac had a desert somewhere in him,
And at the pump he thanked God for all things
That He had put on earth for men to drink,
And he drank well,—so well that I proposed
That we go slowly lest I learn too soon
The bitterness of being left behind,
And all those other things. That was a joke
To Isaac, and it pleased him very much;
And that pleased me—for I was twelve years old.

At the end of an hour's walking after that
The cottage of old Archibald appeared.
Little and white and high on a smooth round hill
It stood, with hackmatacks and apple-trees
Before it, and a big barn-roof beyond:
And over the place—trees, houses, fields and all—
Hovered an air of still simplicity
And a fragrance of old summers—the old style
That lives the while it passes. I dare say
That I was lightly conscious of all this
When Isaac, of a sudden, stopped himself,

And for the long first quarter of a minute
Gazed with incredulous eyes, forgetful quite
Of breezes and of me and of all else
Under the scorching sun but a smooth-cut field,
Faint yellow in the distance. I was young,
But there were a few things that I could see,
And this was one of them.—"Well, well!" said he;
And "Archibald will be surprised, I think,"
Said I. But all my childhood subtlety
Was lost on Isaac, for he strode along
Like something out of Homer—powerful
And awful on the wayside, so I thought.
Also I thought how good it was to be
So near the end of my short-legged endeavor
To keep the pace with Isaac for five miles.
Hardly had we turned in from the main road
When Archibald, with one hand on his back
And the other clutching his huge-headed cane,
Came limping down to meet us.—"Well! well! well!"
Said he; and then he looked at my red face,
All streaked with dust and sweat, and shook my hand,
And said it must have been a right smart walk
That we had had that day from Tilbury Town.—

"Magnificent," said Isaac; and he told
About the beautiful west wind there was
Which cooled and clarified the atmosphere.
"You must have made it with your legs, I guess,"
Said Archibald; and Isaac humored him
With one of those infrequent smiles of his
Which he kept in reserve, apparently,
For Archibald alone. "But why," said he,
"Should Providence have cider in the world
If not for such an afternoon as this?"
And Archibald, with a soft light in his eyes,
Replied that if he chose to go down cellar,
There he would find eight barrels—one of which
Was newly tapped, he said, and to his taste
An honor to the fruit. Isaac approved
Most heartily of that, and guided us
Forthwith, as if his venerable feet
Were measuring the turf in his own door-yard,
Straight to the open rollway. Down we went,
Out of the fiery sunshine to the gloom,
Grateful and half sepulchral, where we found
The barrels, like eight potent sentinels,
Close ranged along the wall. From one of them

A bright pine spile stuck out alluringly,
And on the black flat stone, just under it,
Glimmered a late-spilled proof that Archibald
Had spoken from unfeigned experience.
There was a fluted antique water-glass
Close by, and in it, prisoned, or at rest,
There was a cricket, of the brown soft sort
That feeds on darkness. Isaac turned him out,
And touched him with his thumb to make him jump,
And then composedly pulled out the plug
With such a practised hand that scarce a drop
Did even touch his fingers. Then he drank
And smacked his lips with a slow patronage
And looked along the line of barrels there
With a pride that may have been forgetfulness
That they were Archibald's and not his own.
"I never twist a spigot nowadays,"
He said, and raised the glass up to the light,
"But I thank God for orchards." And that glass
Was filled repeatedly for the same hand
Before I thought it worth while to discern
Again that I was young, and that old age,
With all his woes, had some advantages.

"Now, Archibald," said Isaac, when we stood
Outside again, "I have it in my mind
That I shall take a sort of little walk—
To stretch my legs and see what you are doing.
You stay and rest your back and tell the boy
A story: Tell him all about the time
In Stafford's cabin forty years ago,
When four of us were snowed up for ten days
With only one dried haddock. Tell him all
About it, and be wary of your back.
Now I will go along."—I looked up then
At Archibald, and as I looked I saw
Just how his nostrils widened once or twice
And then grew narrow. I can hear to-day
The way the old man chuckled to himself—
Not wholesomely, not wholly to convince
Another of his mirth,—as I can hear
The lonely sigh that followed.—But at length
He said: "The orchard now's the place for us;
We may find something like an apple there,
And we shall have the shade, at any rate."
So there we went and there we laid ourselves
Where the sun could not reach us; and I champed

A dozen of worm-blighted astrakhans
While Archibald said nothing—merely told
The tale of Stafford's cabin, which was good,
Though "master chilly"—after his own phrase—
Even for a day like that. But other thoughts
Were moving in his mind, imperative,
And writhing to be spoken: I could see
The glimmer of them in a glance or two,
Cautious, or else unconscious, that he gave
Over his shoulder: . . . "Stafford and the rest—
But that's an old song now, and Archibald
And Isaac are old men. Remember, boy,
That we are old. Whatever we have gained,
Or lost, or thrown away, we are old men.
You look before you and we look behind,
And we are playing life out in the shadow—
But that's not all of it. The sunshine lights
A good road yet before us if we look,
And we are doing that when least we know it;
For both of us are children of the sun,
Like you, and like the weed there at your feet.
The shadow calls us, and it frightens us—
We think; but there's a light behind the stars

And we old fellows who have dared to live,
We see it—and we see the other things,
The other things . . . Yes, I have seen it come
These eight years, and these ten years, and I know
Now that it cannot be for very long
That Isaac will be Isaac. You have seen—
Young as you are, you must have seen the strange
Uncomfortable habit of the man?
He'll take my nerves and tie them in a knot
Sometimes, and that's not Isaac. I know that—
And I know what it is: I get it here
A little, in my knees, and Isaac—here."
The old man shook his head regretfully
And laid his knuckles three times on his forehead.
"That's what it is: Isaac is not quite right.
You see it, but you don't know what it means:
The thousand little differences—no,
You do not know them, and it's well you don't;
You'll know them soon enough—God bless you, boy!—
You'll know them, but not all of them—not all.
So think of them as little as you can:
There's nothing in them for you, or for me—
But I am old and I must think of them;

I'm in the shadow, but I don't forget
The light, my boy,—the light behind the stars.
Remember that: remember that I said it;
And when the time that you think far away
Shall come for you to say it—say it, boy;
Let there be no confusion or distrust
In you, no snarling of a life half lived,
Nor any cursing over broken things
That your complaint has been the ruin of.
Live to see clearly and the light will come
To you, and as you need it.—But there, there,
I'm going it again, as Isaac says,
And I'll stop now before you go to sleep.
Only be sure that you growl cautiously,
And always where the shadow may not reach you."

Never shall I forget, long as I live,
The quaint thin crack in Archibald's voice,
The lonely twinkle in his little eyes,
Or the way it made me feel to be with him.
I know I lay and looked for a long time
Down through the orchard and across the road,
Across the river and the sun-scorched hills

That ceased in a blue forest, where the world
Ceased with it. Now and then my fancy caught
A flying glimpse of a good life beyond—
Something of ships and sunlight, streets and singing,
Troy falling, and the ages coming back,
And ages coming forward: Archibald
And Isaac were good fellows in old clothes,
And Agamemnon was a friend of mine;
Ulysses coming home again to shoot
With bows and feathered arrows made another,
And all was as it should be. I was young.

So I lay dreaming of what things I would,
Calm and incorrigibly satisfied
With apples and romance and ignorance,
And the still smoke from Archibald's clay pipe.
There was a stillness over everything,
As if the spirit of heat had laid its hand
Upon the world and hushed it; and I felt
Within the mightiness of the white sun
That smote the land around us and wrought out
A fragrance from the trees, a vital warmth
And fullness for the time that was to come,

And a glory for the world beyond the forest.
The present and the future and the past,
Isaac and Archibald, the burning bush,
The Trojans and the walls of Jericho,
Were beautifully fused; and all went well
Till Archibald began to fret for Isaac
And said it was a master day for sunstroke.
That was enough to make a mummy smile,
I thought; and I remained hilarious,
In face of all precedence and respect,
Till Isaac (who had come to us unheard)
Found he had no tobacco, looked at me
Peculiarly, and asked of Archibald
What ailed the boy to make him chirrup so.
From that he told us what a blessed world
The Lord had given us.—"But Archibald,"
He added, with a sweet severity
That made me think of peach-skins and goose-flesh,
"I'm half afraid you cut those oats of yours
A day or two before they were well set."
"They were set well enough," said Archibald,—
And I remarked the process of his nose
Before the words came out. "But never mind

Your neighbor's oats: you stay here in the shade
And rest yourself while I go find the cards.
We'll have a little game of seven-up
And let the boy keep count."—"We'll have the game,
Assuredly," said Isaac; "and I think
That I will have a drop of cider, also."

They marched away together towards the house
And left me to my childish ruminations
Upon the ways of men. I followed them
Down cellar with my fancy, and then left them
For a fairer vision of all things at once
That was anon to be destroyed again
By the sound of voices and of heavy feet—
One of the sounds of life that I remember,
Though I forget so many that rang first
As if they were thrown down to me from Sinai.

So I remember, even to this day,
Just how they sounded, how they placed themselves,
And how the game went on while I made marks
And crossed them out, and meanwhile made some Trojans.
Likewise I made Ulysses, after Isaac,

And a little after Flaxman. Archibald
Was injured when he found himself left out,
But he had no heroics, and I said so:
I told him that his white beard was too long
And too straight down to be like things in Homer.
"Quite so," said Isaac.—"Low," said Archibald;
And he threw down a deuce with a deep grin
That showed his yellow teeth and made me happy.
So they played on till a bell rang from the door,
And Archibald said, "Supper."—After that
The old men smoked while I sat watching them
And wondered with all comfort what might come
To me, and what might never come to me;
And when the time came for the long walk home
With Isaac in the twilight, I could see
The forest and the sunset and the sky-line,
No matter where it was that I was looking:
The flame beyond the boundary, the music,
The foam and the white ships, and two old men
Were things that would not leave me.—And that night
There came to me a dream—a shining one,
With two old angels in it. They had wings,
And they were sitting where a silver light

Suffused them, face to face. The wings of one
Began to palpitate as I approached,
But I was yet unseen when a dry voice
Cried thinly, with unpatronizing triumph,
"I've got you, Isaac; high, low, jack, and the game."

Isaac and Archibald have gone their way
To the silence of the loved and well-forgotten.
I knew them, and I may have laughed at them;
But there's a laughing that has honor in it,
And I have no regret for light words now.
Rather I think sometimes they may have made
Their sport of me;—but they would not do that,
They were too old for that. They were old men,
And I may laugh at them because I knew them.

And there we were together again—
Together again, we three:
Morgan, Fingal, fiddle, and all,
They had come for the night with me.

The spirit of joy was in Morgan's wrist,
There were songs in Fingal's throat;
And secure outside, for the spray to drench,
Was a tossed and empty boat.

And there were the pipes, and there was the punch,
And somewhere were twelve years;
So it came, in the manner of things unsought,
That a quick knock vexed our ears.

The night wind hovered and shrieked and snarled,
And I heard Fingal swear;
Then I opened the door—but I found no more
Than a chalk-skinned woman there.

I looked, and at last, "What is it?" I said—
"What is it that we can do?"

But never a word could I get from her
  But "You—you three—it is you!"

Now the sense of a crazy speech like that
  Was more than a man could make;
So I said, "But we—we are what, we three?"
  And I saw the creature shake.

"Be quick!" she cried, "for I left her dead—
  And I was afraid to come;
But you, you three—God made it be—
  Will ferry the dead girl home.

"Be quick! be quick!—but listen to that—
  Who is it that makes it?—hark!"
But I heard no more than a knocking splash
  And a wind that shook the dark.

"It is only the wind that blows," I said,
  "And the boat that rocks outside."
And I watched her there, and I pitied her there—
  "Be quick! be quick!" she cried.

She cried so loud that her voice went in
  To find where my two friends were;

So Morgan came, and Fingal came,
And out we went with her.

'Twas a lonely way for a man to take
And a fearsome way for three;
And over the water, and all day long,
They had come for the night with me.

But the girl was dead, as the woman had said,
And the best we could see to do
Was to lay her aboard. The north wind roared,
And into the night we flew.

Four of us living and one for a ghost,
Furrowing crest and swell,
Through the surge and the dark, for that faint far spark,
We ploughed with Azrael.

Three of us ruffled and one gone mad,
Crashing to south we went;
And three of us there were too spattered to care
What this late sailing meant.

So down we steered and along we tore
Through the flash of the midnight foam:
Silent enough to be ghosts on guard,
We ferried the dead girl home.

We ferried her down to the voiceless wharf,
And we carried her up to the light;
And we left the two to the father there,
Who counted the coals that night.

Then back we steered through the foam again,
But our thoughts were fast and few;
And all we did was to crowd the surge
And to measure the life we knew;—

Till at last we came where a dancing gleam
Skipped out to us, we three,—
And the dark wet mooring pointed home
Like a finger from the sea.

Then out we pushed the teetering skiff
And in we drew to the stairs;
And up we went, each man content
With a life that fed no cares.

Fingers were cold and feet were cold,
And the tide was cold and rough;
But the light was warm, and the room was warm,
And the world was good enough.

And there were the pipes, and there was the punch,
More shrewd than Satan's tears:
Fingal had fashioned it, all by himself,
With a craft that comes of years.

And there we were together again—
Together again, we three:
Morgan, Fingal, fiddle, and all,
They were there for the night with me.

AUNT IMOGEN

Aunt Imogen was coming, and therefore
The children—Jane, Sylvester, and Young George—
Were eyes and ears; for there was only one
Aunt Imogen to them in the whole world,
And she was in it only for four weeks
In fifty-two. But those great bites of time
Made all September a Queen's Festival;
And they would strive, informally, to make
The most of them.—The mother understood,
And wisely stepped away. Aunt Imogen
Was there for only one month in the year,
While she, the mother,—she was always there;
And that was what made all the difference.
She knew it must be so, for Jane had once
Expounded it to her so learnedly
That she had looked away from the child's eyes
And thought; and she had thought of many things.

There was a demonstration every time
Aunt Imogen appeared, and there was more
Than one this time. And she was at a loss
Just how to name the meaning of it all:

It puzzled her to think that she could be
So much to any crazy thing alive—
Even to her sister's little savages
Who knew no better than to be themselves;
But in the midst of her glad wonderment
She found herself besieged and overcome
By two tight arms and one tumultuous head,
And therewith half bewildered and half pained
By the joy she felt and by the sudden love
That proved itself in childhood's honest noise.
Jane, by the wings of sex, had reached her first;
And while she strangled her, approvingly,
Sylvester thumped his drum and Young George howled.
But finally, when all was rectified,
And she had stilled the clamor of Young George
By giving him a long ride on her shoulders,
They went together into the old room
That looked across the fields; and Imogen
Gazed out with a girl's gladness in her eyes,
Happy to know that she was back once more
Where there were those who knew her, and at last
Had gloriously got away again
From cabs and clattered asphalt for a while;

And there she sat and talked and looked and laughed
And made the mother and the children laugh.
Aunt Imogen made everybody laugh.

There was the feminine paradox—that she
Who had so little sunshine for herself
Should have so much for others. How it was
That she could make, and feel for making it,
So much of joy for them, and all along
Be covering, like a scar, and while she smiled,
That hungering incompleteness and regret—
That passionate ache for something of her own,
For something of herself—she never knew.
She knew that she could seem to make them all
Believe there was no other part of her
Than her persistent happiness; but the why
And how she did not know. Still none of them
Could have a thought that she was living down-
Almost as if regret were criminal,
So proud it was and yet so profitless—
The penance of a dream, and that was good.
Her sister Jane—the mother of little Jane,

Sylvester, and Young George—might make herself
Believe she knew, for she—well, she was Jane.

Young George, however, did not yield himself
To nourish the false hunger of a ghost
That made no good return. He saw too much:
The accumulated wisdom of his years
Had so conclusively made plain to him
The permanent profusion of a world
Where everybody might have everything
To do, and almost everything to eat,
That he was jubilantly satisfied
And all unthwarted by adversity.
Young George knew things. The world, he had found out,
Was a good place, and life was a good game—
Particularly when Aunt Imogen
Was in it. And one day it came to pass—
One rainy day when she was holding him
And rocking him—that he, in his own right,
Took it upon himself to tell her so;
And something in his way of telling it—
The language, or the tone, or something else—
Gripped like insidious fingers on her throat,

And then went foraging as if to make
A plaything of her heart. Such undeserved
And unsophisticated confidence
Went mercilessly home; and had she sat
Before a looking glass, the deeps of it
Could not have shown more clearly to her then
Than one thought-mirrored little glimpse had shown,
The pang that wrenched her face and filled her eyes
With anguish and intolerable mist.
The blow that she had vaguely thrust aside
Like fright so many times had found her now:
Clean-thrust and final it had come to her
From a child's lips at last, as it had come
Never before, and as it might be felt
Never again. Some grief, like some delight,
Stings hard but once: to custom after that
The rapture or the pain submits itself,
And we are wiser than we were before.
And Imogen was wiser; though at first
Her dream-defeating wisdom was indeed
A thankless heritage: there was no sweet,
No bitter now; nor was there anything
To make a daily meaning for her life—

Till truth, like Harlequin, leapt out somehow
From ambush and threw sudden savor to it—
But the blank taste of time. There were no dreams,
No phantoms in her future any more:
One clinching revelation of what was
One by-flash of irrevocable chance,
Had acridly but honestly foretold
The mystical fulfillment of a life
That might have once . . . But that was all gone by:
There was no need of reaching back for that:
The triumph was not hers: there was no love
Save borrowed love: there was no might have been.

But there was yet Young George—and he had gone
Conveniently to sleep, like a good boy;
And there was yet Sylvester with his drum,
And there was frowzle-headed little Jane;
And there was Jane the sister, and the mother,—
Her sister, and the mother of them all.
They were not hers, not even one of them:
She was not born to be so much as that,
For she was born to be Aunt Imogen.
Now she could see the truth and look at it;

Now she could make stars out where once had palled
A future's emptiness; now she could share
With others—ah, the others!—to the end
The largess of a woman who could smile;
Now it was hers to dance the folly down,
And all the murmuring; now it was hers
To be Aunt Imogen.—So, when Young George
Woke up and blinked at her with his big eyes,
And smiled to see the way she blinked at him,
'T was only in old concord with the stars
That she took hold of him and held him close,
Close to herself, and crushed him till he laughed.

Never mind the day we left, or the day the women clung to us;
All we need now is the last way they looked at us.
Never mind the twelve men there amid the cheering—
Twelve men or one man, 't will soon be all the same;
For this is what we know: we are five men together,
Five left o' twelve men to find the golden river.

Far we came to find it out, but the place was here for all of us;
Far, far we came, and here we have the last of us.
We that were the front men, we that would be early,
We that had the faith, and the triumph in our eyes:
We that had the wrong road, twelve men together,—
Singing when the devil sang to find the golden river.

Say the gleam was not for us, but never say we doubted it;
Say the wrong road was right before we followed it.
We that were the front men, fit for all forage,—
Say that while we dwindle we are front men still;
For this is what we know to-night: we're starving here together—
Starving on the wrong road to find the golden river.

Wrong, we say, but wait a little: hear him in the corner there;
He knows more than we, and he'll tell us if we listen there—

He that fought the snow-sleep less than all the others
Stays awhile yet, and he knows where he stays:
Foot and hand a frozen clout, brain a freezing feather,
Still he's here to talk with us and to the golden river.

"Flow," he says, "and flow along, but you cannot flow away
from us;
All the world's ice will never keep you far from us;
Every man that heeds your call takes the way that leads him—
The one way that's his way, and lives his own life:
Starve or laugh, the game goes on, and on goes the river;
Gold or no, they go their way—twelve men together.

"Twelve," he says, "who sold their shame for a lure you call too
fair for them—
You that laugh and flow to the same word that urges them:
Twelve who left the old town shining in the sunset,
Left the weary street and the small safe days:
Twelve who knew but one way out, wide the way or narrow:
Twelve who took the frozen chance and laid their lives on yellow.

"Flow by night and flow by day, nor ever once be seen by them;
Flow, freeze, and flow, till time shall hide the bones of them;

Laugh and wash their names away, leave them all forgotten,
Leave the old town to crumble where it sleeps;
Leave it there as they have left it, shining in the valley,—
Leave the town to crumble down and let the women marry.

"Twelve of us or five," he says, "we know the night is on us now:
Five while we last, and we may as well be thinking now:
Thinking each his own thought, knowing, when the light comes
Five left or none left, the game will not be lost.
Crouch or sleep, we go the way, the last way together:
Five or none, the game goes on, and on goes the river.

"For after all that we have done and all that we have failed to do,
Life will be life and a world will have its work to do:
Every man who follows us will heed in his own fashion
The calling and the warning and the friends who do not know:
Each will hold an icy knife to punish his heart's lover,
And each will go the frozen way to find the golden river."

There you hear him, all he says, and the last we'll ever get from him.
Now he wants to sleep, and that will be the best for him.
Let him have his own way—no, you needn't shake him—

Your own turn will come, so let the man sleep.
For this is what we know: we are stalled here together—
Hands and feet and hearts of us, to find the golden river.

And there's a quicker way than sleep? . . . Never mind the looks of him:
All he needs now is a finger on the eyes of him.
You there on the left hand, reach a little over—
Shut the stars away, or he'll see them all night:
He'll see them all night and he'll see them all to-morrow,
Crawling down the frozen sky, cold and hard and yellow.

Won't you move an inch or two—to keep the stars away from him?
—No, he won't move, and there's no need of asking him.
Never mind the twelve men, never mind the women;
Three while we last, we'll let them all go;
And we'll hold our thoughts north while we starve here together,
Looking each his own way to find the golden river.

THE GROWTH OF "LORRAINE"

I

While I stood listening, discreetly dumb,
Lorraine was having the last word with me:
"I know," she said, "I know it, but you see
Some creatures are born fortunate, and some
Are born to be found out and overcome,—
Born to be slaves, to let the rest go free;
And if I'm one of them (and I must be)
You may as well forget me and go home.

"You tell me not to say these things, I know,
But I should never try to be content:
I've gone too far; the life would be too slow.
Some could have done it—some girls have the stuff;
But I can't do it: I don't know enough.
I'm going to the devil."—And she went.

II

I did not half believe her when she said
That I should never hear from her again;
Nor when I found a letter from Lorraine,

Was I surprised or grieved at what I read:
"Dear friend, when you find this, I shall be dead.
You are too far away to make me stop.
They say that one drop—think of it, one drop!—
Will be enough,—but I'll take five instead.

"You do not frown because I call you friend,
For I would have you glad that I still keep
Your memory, and even at the end—
Impenitent, sick, shattered—cannot curse
The love that flings, for better or for worse,
This worn-out, cast-out flesh of mine to sleep."

THE SAGE

Foreguarded and unfevered and serene,
Back to the perilous gates of Truth he went—
Back to fierce wisdom and the Orient,
To the Dawn that is, that shall be, and has been:
Previsioned of the madness and the mean,
He stood where Asia, crowned with ravishment,
The curtain of Love's inner shrine and rent,
And after had gone scarred by the Unseen.

There at his touch there was a treasure chest,
And in it was a gleam, but not of gold;
And on it, like a flame, these words were scrolled:
"I keep the mintage of Eternity.
Who comes to take one coin may take the rest,
And all may come—but not without the key."

ERASMUS

When he protested, not too solemnly,
That for a world's achieving maintenance
The crust of overdone divinity
Lacked aliment, they called it recreance;
And when he chose through his own glass to scan
Sick Europe, and reduced, unyieldingly,
The monk within the cassock to the man
Within the monk, they called it heresy.

And when he made so perilously bold
As to be scattered forth in black and white,
Good fathers looked askance at him and rolled
Their inward eyes in anguish and affright;
There were some of them did shake at what was told,
And they shook best who knew that he was right.

THE WOMAN AND THE WIFE

I—The Explanation

"You thought we knew," she said, "but we were wrong.
This we can say, the rest we do not say;
Nor do I let you throw yourself away
Because you love me. Let us both be strong,
And we shall find in sorrow, before long,
Only the price Love ruled that we should pay:
The dark is at the end of every day,
And silence is the end of every song.

"You ask me for one proof that I speak right,
But I can answer only what I know;
You look for just one lie to make black white,
But I can tell you only what is true—
God never made me for the wife of you.
This we can say,—believe me! . . . Tell me so!"

II—The Anniversary

"Give me the truth, whatever it may be.
You thought we knew, now tell me what you miss:
You are the one to tell me what it is—

You are a man, and you have married me.
What is it worth to-night that you can see
More marriage in the dream of one dead kiss
Than in a thousand years of life like this?
Passion has turned the lock, Pride keeps the key.

"Whatever I have said or left unsaid,
Whatever I have done or left undone,—
Tell me. Tell me the truth. . . . Are you afraid?
Do you think that Love was ever fed with lies
But hunger lived thereafter in his eyes?
Do you ask me to take moonlight for the sun?"

. . .

THE BOOK OF ANNANDALE

I

Partly to think, more to be left alone,
George Annandale said something to his friends—
A word or two, brusque, but yet smoothed enough
To suit their funeral gaze—and went upstairs;
And there, in the one room that he could call
His own, he found a sort of meaningless
Annoyance in the mute familiar things
That filled it; for the grate's monotonous gleam
Was not the gleam that he had known before,
The books were not the books that used to be,
The place was not the place. There was a lack
Of something; and the certitude of death
Itself, as with a furtive questioning,
Hovered, and he could not yet understand.
He knew that she was gone—there was no need
Of any argued proof to tell him that,
For they had buried her that afternoon,
Under the leaves and snow; and still there was
A doubt, a pitiless doubt, a plunging doubt,
That struck him, and upstartled when it struck.

The vision, the old thought in him. There was
A lack, and one that wrenched him; but it was
Not that—not that. There was a present sense
Of something indeterminably near—
The soul-clutch of a prescient emptiness
That would not be foreboding. And if not,
What then?—or was it anything at all?
Yes, it was something—it was everything—
But what was everything? or anything?
Tired of time, bewildered, he sat down;
But in his chair he kept on wondering
That he should feel so desolately strange
And yet—for all he knew that he had lost
More of the world than most men ever win—
So curiously calm. And he was left
Unanswered and unsatisfied: there came
No clearer meaning to him than had come
Before; the old abstraction was the best
That he could find, the farthest he could go;
To that was no beginning and no end—
No end that he could reach. So he must learn
To live the surest and the largest life
Attainable in him, would he divine

The meaning of the dream and of the words
That he had written, without knowing why,
On sheets that he had bound up like a book
And covered with red leather. There it was—
There in his desk, the record he had made,
The spiritual plaything of his life:
There were the words no eyes had ever seen
Save his; there were the words that were not made
For glory or for gold. The pretty wife
Whom he had loved and lost had not so much
As heard of them. They were not made for her.
His love had been so much the life of her,
And hers had been so much the life of him,
That any wayward phrasing on his part
Would have had no moment. Neither had lived enough
To know the book, albeit one of them
Had grown enough to write it. There it was,
However, though he knew not why it was:
There was the book, but it was not for her,
For she was dead. And yet, there was the book.
Thus would his fancy circle out and out,
And out and in again, till he would make
As if with a large freedom to crush down

Those under-thoughts. He covered with his hands
His tired eyes, and waited: he could hear—
Or partly feel and hear, mechanically—
The sound of talk, with now and then the steps
And skirts of some one scudding on the stairs,
Forgetful of the nerveless funeral feet
That she had brought with her; and more than once
There came to him a call as of a voice—
A voice of love returning—but not hers.
Whose he knew not, nor dreamed; nor did he know,
Nor did he dream, in his blurred loneliness
Of thought, what all the rest might think of him.

For it had come at last, and she was gone
With all the vanished women of old time,—
And she was never coming back again.
Yes, they had buried her that afternoon,
Under the frozen leaves and the cold earth,
Under the leaves and snow. The flickering week,
The sharp and certain day, and the long drowse
Were over, and the man was left alone.
He knew the loss—therefore it puzzled him
That he should sit so long there as he did,

And bring the whole thing back—the love, the trust,
The pallor, the poor face, and the faint way
She last had looked at him—and yet not weep,
Or even choose to look about the room
To see how sad it was; and once or twice
He winked and pinched his eyes against the flame
And hoped there might be tears. But hope was all,
And all to him was nothing: he was lost.
And yet he was not lost: he was astray—
Out of his life and in another life;
And in the stillness of this other life
He wondered and he drowsed. He wondered when
It was, and wondered if it ever was
On earth that he had known the other face—
The searching face, the eloquent, strange face—
That with a sightless beauty looked at him
And with a speechless promise uttered words
That were not the world's words, or any kind
That he had known before. What was it, then?
What was it held him—fascinated him?
Why should he not be human? He could sigh,
And he could even groan,—but what of that?
There was no grief left in him. Was he glad?

Yet how could he be glad, or reconciled,
Or anything but wretched and undone?
How could he be so frigid and inert—
So like a man with water in his veins
Where blood had been a little while before?
How could he sit shut in there like a snail?
What ailed him? What was on him? Was he glad?
Over and over again the question came,
Unanswered and unchanged,—and there he was.
But what in heaven's name did it all mean?
If he had lived as other men had lived,
If home had ever shown itself to be
The counterfeit that others had called home,
Then to this undivined resource of his
There were some key; but now . . . Philosophy?
Yes, he could reason in a kind of way
That he was glad for Miriam's release—
Much as he might be glad to see his friends
Laid out around him with their grave-clothes on,
And this life done for them; but something else
There was that foundered reason, overwhelmed it,
And with a chilled, intuitive rebuff
Beat back the self-cajoling sophistries
That his half-tutored thought would half-project.

What was it, then? Had he become transformed
And hardened through long watches and long grief
Into a loveless, feelingless dead thing
That brooded like a man, breathed like a man,—
Did everything but ache? And was a day
To come some time when feeling should return
Forever to drive off that other face—
The lineless, indistinguishable face—
That once had thrilled itself between his own
And hers there on the pillow,—and again
Between him and the coffin-lid had flashed
Like fate before it closed,—and at the last
Had come, as it should seem, to stay with him,
Bidden or not? He were a stranger then,
Foredrowsed awhile by some deceiving draught
Of poppied anguish, to the covert grief
And the stark loneliness that waited him,
And for the time were cursedly endowed
With a dull trust that shammed indifference
To knowing there would be no touch again
Of her small hand on his, no silencing
Of her quick lips on his, no feminine
Completeness and love-fragrance in the house,

No sound of some one singing any more,
No smoothing of slow fingers on his hair,
No shimmer of pink slippers on brown tiles.

But there was nothing, nothing, in all that:
He had not fooled himself so much as that;
He might be dreaming or he might be sick,
But not like that. There was no place for fear,
No reason for remorse. There was the book
That he had made, though. . . . It might be the book;
Perhaps he might find something in the book;
But no, there could be nothing there at all—
He knew it word for word; but what it meant—
He was not sure that he had written it
For what it meant; and he was not quite sure
That he had written it;—more likely it
Was all a paper ghost. . . . But the dead wife
Was real: he knew all that, for he had been
To see them bury her; and he had seen
The flowers and the snow and the stripped limbs
Of trees; and he had heard the preacher pray;
And he was back again, and he was glad.
Was he a brute? No, he was not a brute:

He was a man—like any other man:
He had loved and married his wife Miriam,
They had lived a little while in paradise
And she was gone; and that was all of it.

But no, not all of it—not all of it:
There was the book again; something in that
Pursued him, overpowered him, put out
The futile strength of all his whys and wheres,
And left him unintelligibly numb—
Too numb to care for anything but rest.
It must have been a curious kind of book
That he had made it; it was a drowsy book
At any rate. The very thought of it
Was like the taste of some impossible drink—
A taste that had no taste, but for all that
Had mixed with it a strange thought-cordial,
So potent that it somehow killed in him
The ultimate need of doubting any more—
Of asking any more. Did he but live
The life that he must live, there was no more
To seek.—The rest of it was on the way.

Still there was nothing, nothing, in all this—
Nothing that he cared now to reconcile
With reason or with sorrow. All he knew
For certain was that he was tired out:
His flesh was heavy and his blood beat small;
Something supreme had been wrenched out of him
As if to make vague room for something else.
He had been through too much. Yes, he would stay
There where he was and rest.—And there he stayed;
The daylight became twilight, and he stayed;
The flame and the face faded, and he slept.
And they had buried her that afternoon,
Under the tight-screwed lid of a long box,
Under the earth, under the leaves and snow.

II

Look where she would, feed conscience how she might,
There was but one way now for Damaris—
One straight way that was hers, hers to defend,
At hand, imperious. But the nearness of it,
The flesh-bewildering simplicity,
And the plain strangeness of it, thrilled again

That wretched little quivering single string
Which yielded not, but held her to the place
Where now for five triumphant years had slept
The flameless dust of Argan.—He was gone,
The good man she had married long ago,
And she had lived, and living she had learned,
And surely there was nothing to regret:
Much happiness had been for each of them,
And they had been like lovers to the last:
And after that, and long, long after that,
Her tears had washed out more of widowed grief
Than smiles had ever told of other joy.—
But could she, looking back, find anything
That should return to her in the new time,
And with relentless magic uncreate
This temple of new love where she had thrown
Dead sorrow on the altar of new life?
Only one thing, only one thread was left;
When she broke that, when reason snapped it off,
And once for all, baffled, the grave let go
The trivial hideous hold it had on her,—
Then she were free, free to be what she would,
Free to be what she was.—And yet she stayed,

Leashed, as it were, and with a cobweb strand,
Close to a tombstone—maybe to starve there.

But why to starve? And why stay there at all?
Why not make one good leap and then be done
Forever and at once with Argan's ghost
And all such outworn churchyard servitude?
For it was Argan's ghost that held the string,
And her sick fancy that held Argan's ghost—
Held it and pitied it. She laughed, almost,
There for the moment; but her strained eyes filled
With tears, and she was angry for those tears—
Angry at first, then proud, then sorry for them.
So she grew calm; and after a vain chase
For thoughts more vain, she questioned of herself
What measure of primeval doubts and fears
Were still to be gone through that she might win
Persuasion of her strength and of herself
To be what she could see that she must be,
No matter where the ghost was.—And the more
She lived, the more she came to recognize
That something out of her thrilled ignorance
Was luminously, proudly being born,

And thereby proving, thought by forward thought,
The prowess of its image; and she learned
At length to look right on to the long days
Before her without fearing. She could watch
The coming course of them as if they were
No more than birds, that slowly, silently,
And irretrievably should wing themselves
Uncounted out of sight. And when he came
Again, she might be free—she would be free.
Else, when he looked at her she must look down,
Defeated, and malignly dispossessed
Of what was hers to prove and in the proving
Wisely to consecrate. And if the plague
Of that perverse defeat should come to be—
If at that sickening end she were to find
Herself to be the same poor prisoner
That he had found at first—then she must lose
All sight and sound of him, she must abjure
All possible thought of him; for he would go
So far and for so long from her that love—
Yes, even a love like his, exiled enough,
Might for another's touch be born again—
Born to be lost and starved for and not found;

Or, at the next, the second wretchedest,
It might go mutely flickering down and out,
And on some incomplete and piteous day,
Some perilous day to come, she might at last
Learn, with a noxious freedom, what it is
To be at peace with ghosts. Then were the blow
Thrice deadlier than any kind of death
Could ever be: to know that she had won
The truth too late—there were the dregs indeed
Of wisdom, and of love the final thrust
Unmerciful; and there where now did lie
So plain before her the straight radiance
Of what was her appointed way to take,
Were only the bleak ruts of an old road
That stretched ahead and faded and lay far
Through deserts of unconscionable years.

But vampire thoughts like these confessed the doubt
That love denied; and once, if never again,
They should be turned away. They might come back—
More craftily, perchance, they might come back—
And with a spirit-thirst insatiable
Finish the strength of her; but now, to-day

She would have none of them. She knew that love
Was true, that he was true, that she was true;
And should a death-bed snare that she had made
So long ago be stretched inexorably
Through all her life, only to be unspun
With her last breathing? And were bats and threads
Accursedly devised with watered gules,
To be Love's heraldry? What were it worth
To live and to find out that life were life
But for an unrequited incubus
Of outlawed shame that would not be thrown down
Till she had thrown down fear and overcome
The woman that was yet so much of her
That she might yet go mad? What were it worth
To live, to linger, and to be condemned
In her submission to a common thought
That clogged itself and made of its first faith
Its last impediment? What augured it,
Now in this quick beginning of new life,
To clutch the sunlight and be feeling back,
Back with a scared fantastic fearfulness,
To touch, not knowing why, the vexed-up ghost
Of what was gone?

Yes, there was Argan's face,
Pallid and pinched and ruinously marked
With big pathetic bones; there were his eyes,
Quiet and large, fixed wistfully on hers;
And there, close-pressed again within her own,
Quivered his cold thin fingers. And, ah! yes,
There were the words, those dying words again,
And hers that answered when she promised him.
Promised him? . . . yes. And had she known the truth
Of what she felt that he should ask her that,
And had she known the love that was to be,
God knew that she could not have told him then.
But then she knew it not, nor thought of it;
There was no need of it; nor was there need
Of any problematical support
Whereto to cling while she convinced herself
That love's intuitive utility,
Inexorably merciful, had proved
That what was human was unpermanent
And what was flesh was ashes. She had told
Him then that she would love no other man,
That there was not another man on earth
Whom she could ever love, or who could make

So much as a love thought go through her brain;
And he had smiled. And just before he died
His lips had made as if to say something—
Something that passed unwhispered with his breath,
Out of her reach, out of all quest of it.
And then, could she have known enough to know
The meaning of her grief, the folly of it,
The faithlessness and the proud anguish of it,
There might be now no threads to punish her,
No vampire thoughts to suck the coward blood,
The life, the very soul of her.

Yes, yes,
They might come back. . . . But why should they come back?
Why was it she had suffered? Why had she
Struggled and grown these years to demonstrate
That close without those hovering clouds of gloom
And through them here and there forever gleamed
The Light itself, the life, the love, the glory,
Which was of its own radiance good proof
That all the rest was darkness and blind sight?
And who was *she?* The woman she had known—
The woman she had petted and called "I"—

The woman she had pitied, and at last
Commiserated for the most abject
And persecuted of all womankind,—
Could it be she that had sought out the way
To measure and thereby to quench in her
The woman's fear—the fear of her not fearing?
A nervous little laugh that lost itself,
Like logic in a dream, fluttered her thoughts
An instant there that ever she should ask
What she might then have told so easily—
So easily that Annandale had frowned,
Had he been given wholly to be told
The truth of what had never been before
So passionately, so inevitably
Confessed.

For she could see from where she sat
The sheets that he had bound up like a book
And covered with red leather; and her eyes
Could see between the pages of the book,
Though her eyes, like them, were closed. And she could read
As well as if she had them in her hand,
What he had written on them long ago,—

Six years ago, when he was waiting for her.
She might as well have said that she could see
The man himself, as once he would have looked
Had she been there to watch him while he wrote
Those words, and all for her. . . . For her whose face
Had flashed itself, prophetic and unseen,
But not unspirited, between the life
That would have been without her and the life
That he had gathered up like frozen roots
Out of a grave-clod lying at his feet,
Unconsciously, and as unconsciously
Transplanted and revived. He did not know
The kind of life that he had found, nor did
He doubt, not knowing it; but well he knew
That it was life—new life, and that the old
Might then with unimprisoned wings go free,
Onward and all along to its own light,
Through the appointed shadow.

While she gazed
Upon it there she felt within herself
The growing of a newer consciousness—
The pride of something fairer than her first

Outclamoring of interdicted thought
Had ever quite foretold; and all at once
There quivered and requivered through her flesh,
Like music, like the sound of an old song,
Triumphant, love-remembered murmurings
Of what for passion's innocence had been
Too mightily, too perilously hers,
Ever to be reclaimed and realized
Until to-day. To-day she could throw off
The burden that had held her down so long,
And she could stand upright, and she could see
The way to take, with eyes that had in them
No gleam but of the spirit. Day or night,
No matter; she could see what was to see—
All that had been till now shut out from her,
The service, the fulfillment, and the truth,
And thus the cruel wiseness of it all.

So Damaris, more like than anything
To one long prisoned in a twilight cave
With hovering bats for all companionship,
And after time set free to fight the sun,

Laughed out, so glad she was to recognize
The test of what had been, through all her folly,
The courage of her conscience; for she knew,
Now on a late-flushed autumn afternoon
That else had been too bodeful of dead things
To be endured with aught but the same old
Inert, self-contradicted martyrdom
Which she had known so long, that she could look
Right forward through the years, nor any more
Shrink with a cringing prescience to behold
The glitter of dead summer on the grass,
Or the brown-glimmered crimson of still trees
Across the intervale where flashed along,
Black-silvered, the cold river. She had found,
As if by some transcendent freakishness
Of reason, the glad life that she had sought
Where naught but obvious clouds could ever be—
Clouds to put out the sunlight from her eyes,
And to put out the love-light from her soul.
But they were gone now—yes, they were all gone;
And with a whimsied pathos, like the mist
Of grief that clings to new-found happiness
Hard wrought, she might have pity for the small

Defeated quest of them that brushed her sight
Like flying lint—lint that had once been thread. . . .

Yes, like an anodyne, the voice of him,
There were the words that he had made for her,
For her alone. The more she thought of them
The more she lived them, and the more she knew
The life-grip and the pulse of warm strength in them.
They were the first and last of words to her,
And there was in them a far questioning
That had for long been variously at work,
Divinely and elusively at work,
With her, and with the grave that had been hers;
They were eternal words, and they diffused
A flame of meaning that men's lexicons
Had never kindled; they were choral words
That harmonized with love's enduring chords
Like wisdom with release; triumphant words
That rang like elemental orisons
Through ages out of ages; words that fed
Love's hunger in the spirit; words that smote;
Thrilled words that echoed, and barbed words that clung;—
And every one of them was like a friend

Whose obstinate fidelity, well tried,
Had found at last and irresistibly
The way to her close conscience, and thereby
Revealed the unsubstantial Nemesis
That she had clutched and shuddered at so long;
And every one of them was like a real
And ringing voice, clear toned and absolute,
But of a love-subdued authority
That uttered thrice the plain significance
Of what had else been generously vague
And indolently true. It may have been
The triumph and the magic of the soul,
Unspeakably revealed, that finally
Had reconciled the grim probationing
Of wisdom with unalterable faith,
But she could feel—not knowing what it was,
For the sheer freedom of it—a new joy
That humanized the latent wizardry
Of his prophetic voice and put for it
The man within the music.

So it came
To pass, like many a long-compelled emprise

That with its first accomplishment almost
Annihilates its own severity,
That she could find, whenever she might look,
The certified achievement of a love
That had endured, self-guarded and supreme,
To the glad end of all that wavering;
And she could see that now the flickering world
Of autumn was awake with sudden bloom,
New-born, perforce, of a slow bourgeoning.
And she had found what more than half had been
The grave-deluded, flesh-bewildered fear
Which men and women struggle to call faith,
To be the paid progression to an end
Whereat she knew the foresight and the strength
To glorify the gift of what was hers,
To vindicate the truth of what she was.
And had it come to her so suddenly?
There was a pity and a weariness
In asking that, and a great needlessness;
For now there were no wretched quivering strings
That held her to the churchyard any more:
There were no thoughts that flapped themselves like bats
Around her any more. The shield of love

Was clean, and she had paid enough to learn
How it had always been so. And the truth,
Like silence after some far victory,
Had come to her, and she had found it out
As if it were a vision, a thing born
So suddenly!—just as a flower is born,
Or as a world is born—so suddenly.

SAINTE-NITOUCHE

Though not for common praise of him,
Nor yet for pride or charity,
Still would I make to Vanderberg
One tribute for his memory:

One honest warrant of a friend
Who found with him that flesh was grass—
Who neither blamed him in defect
Nor marveled how it came to pass;

Or why it ever was that he—
That Vanderberg, of all good men,
Should lose himself to find himself,
Straightway to lose himself again.

For we had buried Sainte-Nitouche,
And he had said to me that night:
"Yes, we have laid her in the earth,
But what of that?" And he was right.

And he had said: "We have a wife,
We have a child, we have a church;

'T would be a scurrilous way out
If we should leave them in the lurch.

"That's why I have you here with me
To-night: you know a talk may take
The place of bromide, cyanide,
Et cetera. For heaven's sake,

"Why do you look at me like that?
What have I done to freeze you so?
Dear man, you see where friendship means
A few things yet that you don't know;

"And you see partly why it is
That I am glad for what is gone:
For Sainte-Nitouche and for the world
In me that followed. What lives on—

"Well, here you have it: here at home—
For even home will yet return.
You know the truth is on my side,
And that will make the embers burn.

"I see them brighten while I speak,
I see them flash,—and they are mine!
You do not know them, but I do:
I know the way they used to shine.

"And I know more than I have told
Of other life that is to be:
I shall have earned it when it comes,
And when it comes I shall be free.

"Not as I was before she came,
But farther on for having been
The servitor, the slave of her—
The fool, you think. But there's your sin—

"Forgive me!—and your ignorance:
Could you but have the vision here
That I have, you would understand
As I do that all ways are clear

"For those who dare to follow them
With earnest eyes and honest feet.
But Sainte-Nitouche has made the way
For me, and I shall find it sweet.

"Sweet with a bitter sting left?—Yes,
Bitter enough, God knows, at first;
But there are more steep ways than one
To make the best look like the worst;

"And here is mine—the dark and hard,
For me to follow, trust, and hold:
And worship, so that I may leave
No broken story to be told.

"Therefore I welcome what may come,
Glad for the days, the nights, the years."—
An upward flash of ember-flame
Revealed the gladness in his tears.

"You see them, but you know," said he,
"Too much to be incredulous:
You know the day that makes us wise,
The moment that makes fools of us.

"So I shall follow from now on
The road that she has found for me:
The dark and starry way that leads
Right upward, and eternally.

"Stumble at first? I may do that;
And I may grope, and hate the night;
But there's a guidance for the man
Who stumbles upward for the light,

"And I shall have it all from her,
The foam-born child of innocence.
I feel you smiling while I speak,
But that's of little consequence;

"For when we learn that we may find
The truth where others miss the mark,
What is it worth for us to know
That friends are smiling in the dark?

"Could we but share the lonely pride
Of knowing, all would then be well;
But knowledge often writes itself
In flaming words we cannot spell.

"And I, who have my work to do,
Look forward; and I dare to see,
Far stretching and all mountainous,
God's pathway through the gloom for me."

I found so little to say then
That I said nothing.—"Say good-night,"
Said Vanderberg; "and when we meet
To-morrow, tell me I was right.

"Forget the dozen other things
That you have not the faith to say;
For now I know as well as you
That you are glad to go away."

I could have blessed the man for that,
And he could read me with a smile:
"You doubt," said he, "but if we live
You'll know me in a little while."

He lived; and all as he foretold,
I knew him—better than he thought:
My fancy did not wholly dig
The pit where I believed him caught.

But yet he lived and laughed, and preached,
And worked—as only players can:
He scoured the shrine that once was home
And kept himself a clergyman.

The clockwork of his cold routine
Put friends far off that once were near;
The five staccatos in his laugh
Were too defensive and too clear;

The glacial sermons that he preached
Were longer than they should have been;
And, like the man who fashioned them,
The best were too divinely thin.

But still he lived, and moved, and had
The sort of being that was his,
Till on a day the shrine of home
For him was in the Mysteries:—

"My friend, there's one thing yet," said he,
"And one that I have never shared
With any man that I have met;
But you—you know me." And he stared

For a slow moment at me then
With conscious eyes that had the gleam,
The shine, before the stroke:—"You know
The ways of us, the way we dream:

"You know the glory we have won,
  You know the glamour we have lost;
You see me now, you look at me,—
  And yes, you pity me, almost;

"But never mind the pity—no,
  Confess the faith you can't conceal;
And if you frown, be not like one
  Of those who frown before they feel.

"For there is truth, and half truth,—yes,
  And there's a quarter truth, no doubt;
But mine was more than half. . . . You smile?
  You understand? You bear me out?

"You always knew that I was right—
  You are my friend—and I have tried
Your faith—your love."—The gleam grew small,
  The stroke was easy, and he died.

I saw the dim look change itself
  To one that never will be dim;
I saw the dead flesh to the grave,
  But that was not the last of him.

For what was his to live lives yet:
Truth, quarter truth, death cannot reach;
Nor is it always what we know
That we are fittest here to teach.

The fight goes on when fields are still,
The triumph clings when arms are down;
The jewels of all coronets
Are pebbles of the unseen crown;

The specious weight of loud reproof
Sinks where a still conviction floats;
And on God's ocean after storm
Time's wreckage is half pilot-boats;

And what wet faces wash to sight
Thereafter feed the common moan;
But Vanderberg no pilot had,
Nor could have: he was all alone.

Unchallenged by the larger light
The starry quest was his to make;
And of all ways that are for men,
The starry way was his to take.

We grant him idle names enough
To-day, but even while we frown
The fight goes on, the triumph clings,
And there is yet the unseen crown.

But was it his? Did Vanderberg
Find half truth to be passion's thrall,
Or as we met him day by day,
Was love triumphant, after all?

I do not know so much as that;
I only know that he died right:
Saint Anthony nor Sainte-Nitouche
Had ever smiled as he did—quite.

ALCESTIS

Shall I never make him look at me again?
I look at him, I look my life at him,
I tell him all I know the way to tell,
But there he stays the same.

Shall I never make him speak one word to me?
Shall I never make him say enough to show
My heart if he be glad? Be glad? . . . ah! God.
Why did they bring me back?

I wonder, if I go to him again,
If I take him by those two cold hands again,
Shall I get one look of him at last, or feel
One sign—or anything?

Or will he still sit there in the same way,
Without an answer for me from his lips,
Or from his eyes,—or even with a touch
Of his hand on my hand? . . .

"Will you look down this once—look down at me?
Speak once—and if you never speak again,
Tell me enough—tell me enough to make
Me know that you are glad!

"You are my King, and once my King would speak:
You were Admetus once, you loved me once:
Life was a dream of heaven for us once—
And has the dream gone by?

"Do I cling to shadows when I call you Life?
Do you love me still, or are the shadows all?
Or is it I that love you in the grave,
And you that mourn for me?

"If it be that, then do not mourn for me;
Be glad that I have loved you, and be King.
But if it be not that—if it be true . . .
Tell me if it be true!"

Then with a choking answer the King spoke;
But never touched his hand on hers, or fixed
His eyes on hers, or on the face of her:
"Yes, it is true," he said.

"You are alive, and you are with me now;
And you are reaching up to me that I—
That I may take you—I that am a King—
I that was once a man."

So then she knew. She might have known before;
Truly, she thought, she must have known it long
Before: she must have known it when she came
From that great sleep of hers.

She knew the truth, but not yet all of it:
He loved her, but he would not let his eyes
Prove that he loved her; and he would not hold
His wife there in his arms.

So, like a slave, she waited at his knees,
And waited. She was not unhappy now.
She quivered, but she knew that he would speak
Again—and he did speak.

And while she felt the tremor of his words,
He told her all there was for him to tell;
And then he turned his face to meet her face,
That she might look at him.

She looked; and all her trust was in that look,
And all her faith was in it, and her love;
And when his answer to that look came back,
It flashed back through his tears.

So then she put her arms around his neck,
And kissed him on his forehead and his lips;
And there she clung, fast in his arms again,
Triumphant, with closed eyes.

At last, half whispering, she spoke once more:
"Why was it that you suffered for so long?
Why could you not believe me—trust in me?
Was I so strange as that?

"We suffer when we do not understand;
And you have suffered—you that love me now—
Because you are a man. . . . There is one thing
No man can understand.

"I would have given everything?—gone down
To Tartarus—to silence? Was it that?
I would have died? I would have let you live?—
And was it very strange?"

THE CORRIDOR

It may have been the pride in me for aught
I know, or just a patronizing whim;
But call it freak or fancy, or what not,
I cannot hide that hungry face of him.

I keep a scant half-dozen words he said,
And every now and then I lose his name;
He may be living or he may be dead,
But I must have him with me all the same.

I knew it, and I knew it all along,—
And felt it once or twice, or thought I did;
But only as a glad man feels a song
That sounds around a stranger's coffin lid.

I knew it, and he knew it, I believe,
But silence held us alien to the end;
And I have now no magic to retrieve
That year, to stop that hunger for a friend.

CORTÈGE

Four o'clock this afternoon,
Fifteen hundred miles away:
So it goes, the crazy tune,
So it pounds and hums all day

Four o'clock this afternoon,
Earth will hide them far away:
Best they go to go so soon,
Best for them the grave to-day.

Had she gone but half so soon,
Half the world had passed away.
Four o'clock this afternoon,
Best for them they go to-day.

Four o'clock this afternoon
Love will hide them deep, they say;
Love that made the grave so soon,
Fifteen hundred miles away.

Four o'clock this afternoon—
Ah, but they go slòw to-day:

Slow to suit my crazy tune,
Past the need of all we say.

Best it came to come so soon,
Best for them they go to-day:
Four o'clock this afternoon,
Fifteen hundred miles away.

PARTNERSHIP

Yes, you have it; I can see.
Beautiful? . . . Dear, look at me!
Look and let my shame confess
Triumph after weariness.
Beautiful? Ah, yes.

Lift it where the beams are bright;
Hold it where the western light,
Shining in above my bed,
Throws a glory on your head.
Now it is all said.

All there was for me to say
From the first until to-day.
Long denied and long deferred,
Now I say it in one word—
Now, and you have heard.

Life would have its way with us,
And I've called it glorious:
For I know the glory now
And I read it on your brow.
You have shown me how.

I can feel your cheeks all wet,
But your eyes will not forget:
In the frown you cannot hide
I can read where faith and pride
Are not satisfied.

But the word was, two should live:
Two should suffer—and forgive:
By the steep and weary way,
For the glory of the clay,
Two should have their day.

We have toiled and we have wept
For the gift the gods have kept:
Clashing and unreconciled
When we might as well have smiled,
We have played the child.

But the clashing is all past,
And the gift is yours at last.
Lift it—hold it high again! . . .
Did I doubt you now and then?
Well, we are not men.

Never mind; we know the way,—
And I do not need to stay.
Let us have it well confessed:
You to triumph, I to rest.
That will be the best.

TWILIGHT SONG

Through the shine, through the rain
We have shared the day's load;
To the old march again
We have tramped the long road;
We have laughed, we have cried,
And we've tossed the King's crown;
We have fought, we have died,
And we've trod the day down.
So it's lift the old song
Ere the night flies again,
Where the road leads along
Through the shine, through the rain.

Long ago, far away,
Came a sign from the skies;
And we feared then to pray
For the new sun to rise:
With the King there at hand,
Not a child stepped or stirred—
Where the light filled the land
And the light brought the word;

For we knew then the gleam
Though we feared then the day,
And the dawn smote the dream
Long ago, far away.

But the road leads us all,
For the King now is dead;
And we know, stand or fall,
We have shared the day's bread.
We may laugh down the dream,
For the dream breaks and flies;
And we trust now the gleam,
For the gleam never dies;—
So it's off now the load,
For we know the night's call,
And we know now the road
And the road leads us all.

Through the shine, through the rain,
We have wrought the day's quest;
To the old march again
We have earned the day's rest;
We have laughed, we have cried,

And we've heard the King's groans;
We have fought, we have died,
And we've burned the King's bones,
And we lift the old song
Ere the night flies again,
Where the road leads along
Through the shine, through the rain.

VARIATIONS OF GREEK THEMES

I

A Happy Man

(*Carphyllides*)

When these graven lines you see,
Traveler, do not pity me;
Though I be among the dead,
Let no mournful word be said.

Children that I leave behind,
And their children, all were kind;
Near to them and to my wife,
I was happy all my life.

My three sons I married right,
And their sons I rocked at night;
Death nor sorrow ever brought
Cause for one unhappy thought.

Now, and with no need of tears,
Here they leave me, full of years,—
Leave me to my quiet rest
In the region of the blest.

II

A Mighty Runner

(*Nicarchus*)

The day when Charmus ran with five
In Arcady, as I'm alive,
He came in seventh.—"Five and one
Make seven, you say? It can't be done."—
Well, if you think it needs a note,
A friend in a fur overcoat
Ran with him, crying all the while,
"You'll beat 'em, Charmus, by a mile!"
And so he came in seventh.
Therefore, good Zoilus, you see
The thing is plain as plain can be;
And with four more for company,
He would have been eleventh.

III

The Raven

(*Nicarchus*)

The gloom of death is on the raven's wing,
The song of death is in the raven's cries:
But when Demophilus begins to sing,
The raven dies.

IV

Eutychides

(*Lucilius*)

Eutychides, who wrote the songs,
Is going down where he belongs.
O you unhappy ones, beware:
Eutychides will soon be there!
For he is coming with twelve lyres,
And with more than twice twelve quires
Of the stuff that he has done
In the world from which he's gone.
Ah, now must you know death indeed,
For he is coming with all speed;
And with Eutychides in Hell,
Where's a poor tortured soul to dwell?

V

Doricha

(*Posidippus*)

So now the very bones of you are gone
Where they were dust and ashes long ago;
And there was the last ribbon you tied on
To bind your hair, and that is dust also;
And somewhere there is dust that was of old
A soft and scented garment that you wore—
The same that once till dawn did closely fold
You in with fair Charaxus, fair no more.

But Sappho, and the white leaves of her song,
Will make your name a word for all to learn,
And all to love thereafter, even while
It's but a name; and this will be as long
As there are distant ships that will return
Again to your Naucratis and the Nile.

VI

The Dust of Timas

(Sappho)

This dust was Timas; and they say
That almost on her wedding day
She found her bridal home to be
The dark house of Persephone.

And many maidens, knowing then
That she would not come back again,
Unbound their curls; and all in tears,
They cut them off with sharpened shears.

VII

Aretemias

(Antipater of Sidon)

I'm sure I see it all now as it was,
When first you set your foot upon the shore
Where dim Cocytus flows for evermore,
And how it came to pass
That all those Dorian women who are there

In Hades, and still fair,
Came up to you, so young, and wept and smiled
When they beheld you and your little child.
And then, I'm sure, with tears upon your face
To be in that sad place,
You told of the two children you had borne
And then of Euphron, whom you leave to mourn.
"One stays with him," you said,
"And this one I bring with me to the dead."

VIII

The Old Story

(*Marcus Argentarius*)

Like many a one, when you had gold
Love met you smiling, we are told;
But now that all your gold is gone,
Love leaves you hungry and alone.

And women, who have called you more
Sweet names than ever were before,
Will ask another now to tell
What man you are and where you dwell.

Was ever anyone but you
So long in learning what is true?
Must you find only at the end
That who has nothing has no friend?

IX

To-morrow

(*Macedonius*)

To-morrow? Then your one word left is always now the same:
And that's a word that names a day that has no more a name.
To-morrow, I have learned at last, is all you have to give:
The rest will be another's now, as long as I may live.
You will see me in the evening?—And what evening has there been,
Since time began with women, but old age and wrinkled skin?

X

Lais to Aphrodite

(*Pluto*)

When I, poor Lais, with my crown
Of beauty could laugh Hellas down,
Young lovers crowded at my door,
Where now my lovers come no more.

So, Goddess, you will not refuse
A mirror that has now no use;
For what I was I cannot be,
And what I am I will not see.

XI

An Inscription by the Sea

(Glaucus)

No dust have I to cover me,
  My grave no man may show;
My tomb is this unending sea,
  And I lie far below.
My fate, O stranger, was to drown;
And where it was the ship went down
  Is what the sea-birds know.

THE FIELD OF GLORY

War shook the land where Levi dwelt,
And fired the dismal wrath he felt,
That such a doom was ever wrought
As his, to toil while others fought;
To toil, to dream—and still to dream,
With one day barren as another;
To consummate, as it would seem,
The dry despair of his old mother.

Far off one afternoon began
The sound of man destroying man;
And Levi, sick with nameless rage,
Condemned again his heritage,
And sighed for scars that might have come,
And would, if once he could have sundered
Those harsh, inhering claims of home
That held him while he cursed and wondered.

Another day, and then there came,
Rough, bloody, ribald, hungry, lame,
But yet themselves, to Levi's door,
Two remnants of the day before.

They laughed at him and what he sought;
They jeered him, and his painful acre;
But Levi knew that they had fought,
And left their manners to their Maker.

That night, for the grim widow's ears,
With hopes that hid themselves in fears,
He told of arms, and fiery deeds,
Whereat one leaps the while he reads,
And said he'd be no more a clown,
While others drew the breath of battle.—
The mother looked him up and down,
And laughed—a scant laugh with a rattle.

She told him what she found to tell,
And Levi listened, and heard well
Some admonitions of a voice
That left him no cause to rejoice.—
He sought a friend, and found the stars,
And prayed aloud that they should aid him;
But they said not a word of wars,
Or of a reason why God made him.

And who's of this or that estate
We do not wholly calculate,
When baffling shades that shift and cling
Are not without their glimmering;
When even Levi, tired of faith,
Beloved of none, forgot by many,
Dismissed as an inferior wraith,
Reborn may be as great as any.

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